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IN A COUNTY ASYLUM

A NOVEL



RICHARD Z. DALE



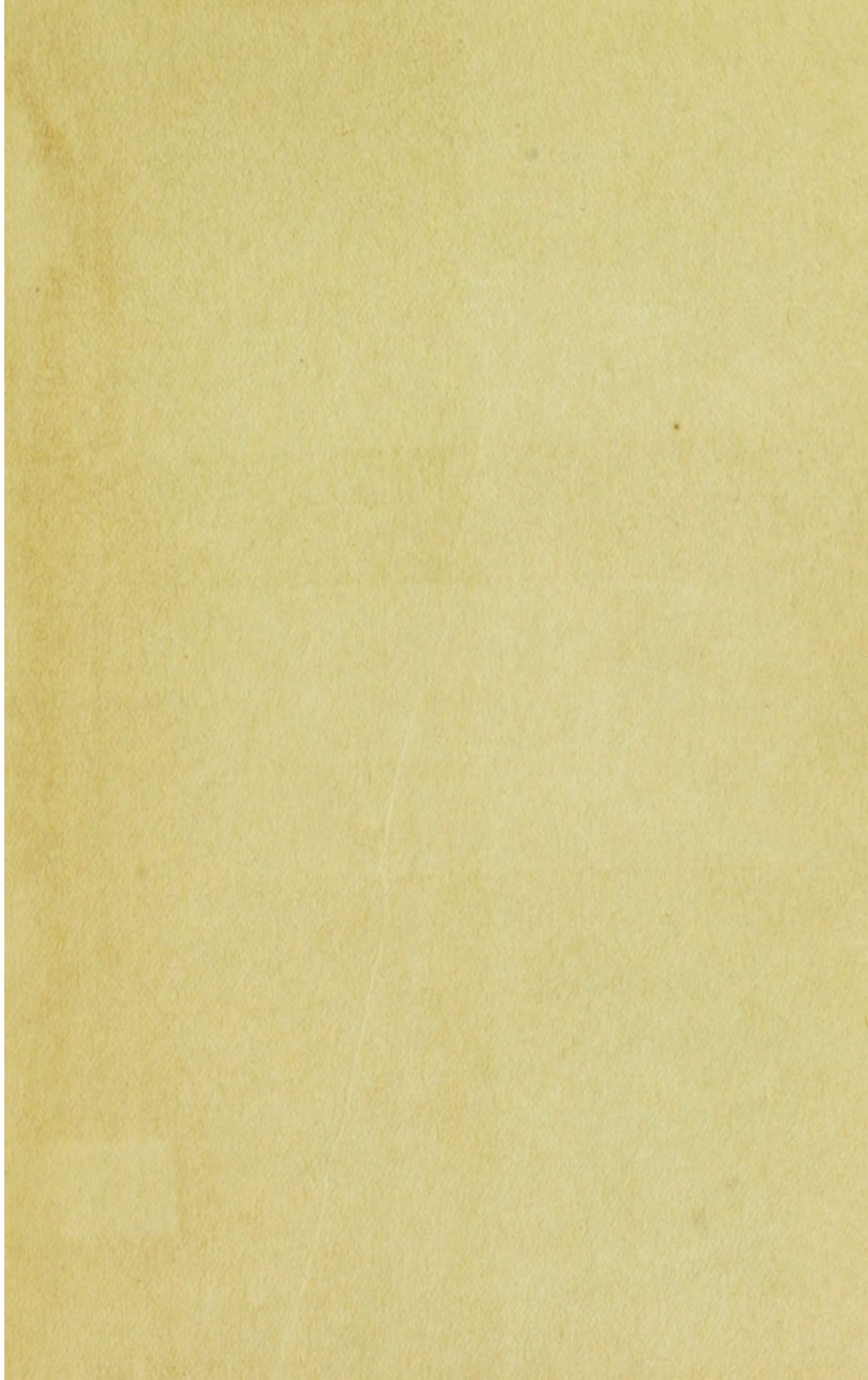
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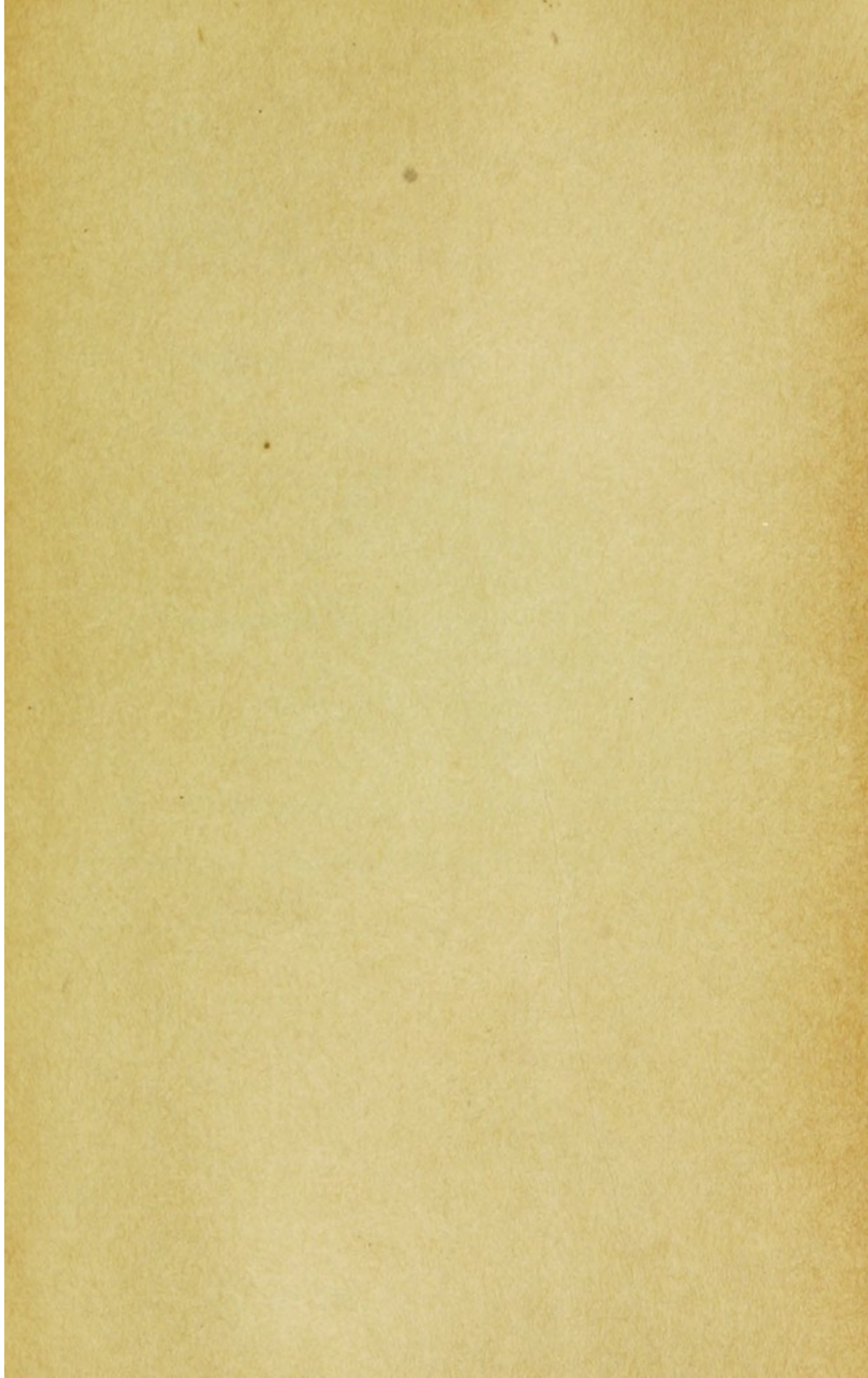
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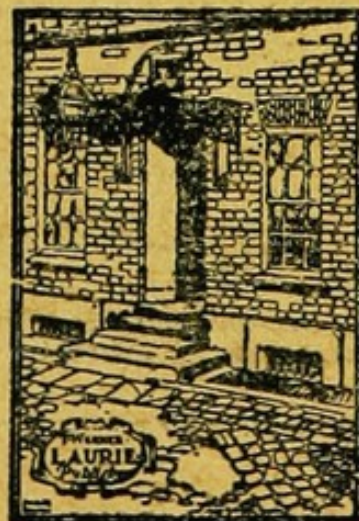




IN A COUNTY

ASYLUM

A NOVEL



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A Novel

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IN A COUNTY ASYLUM

A NOVEL

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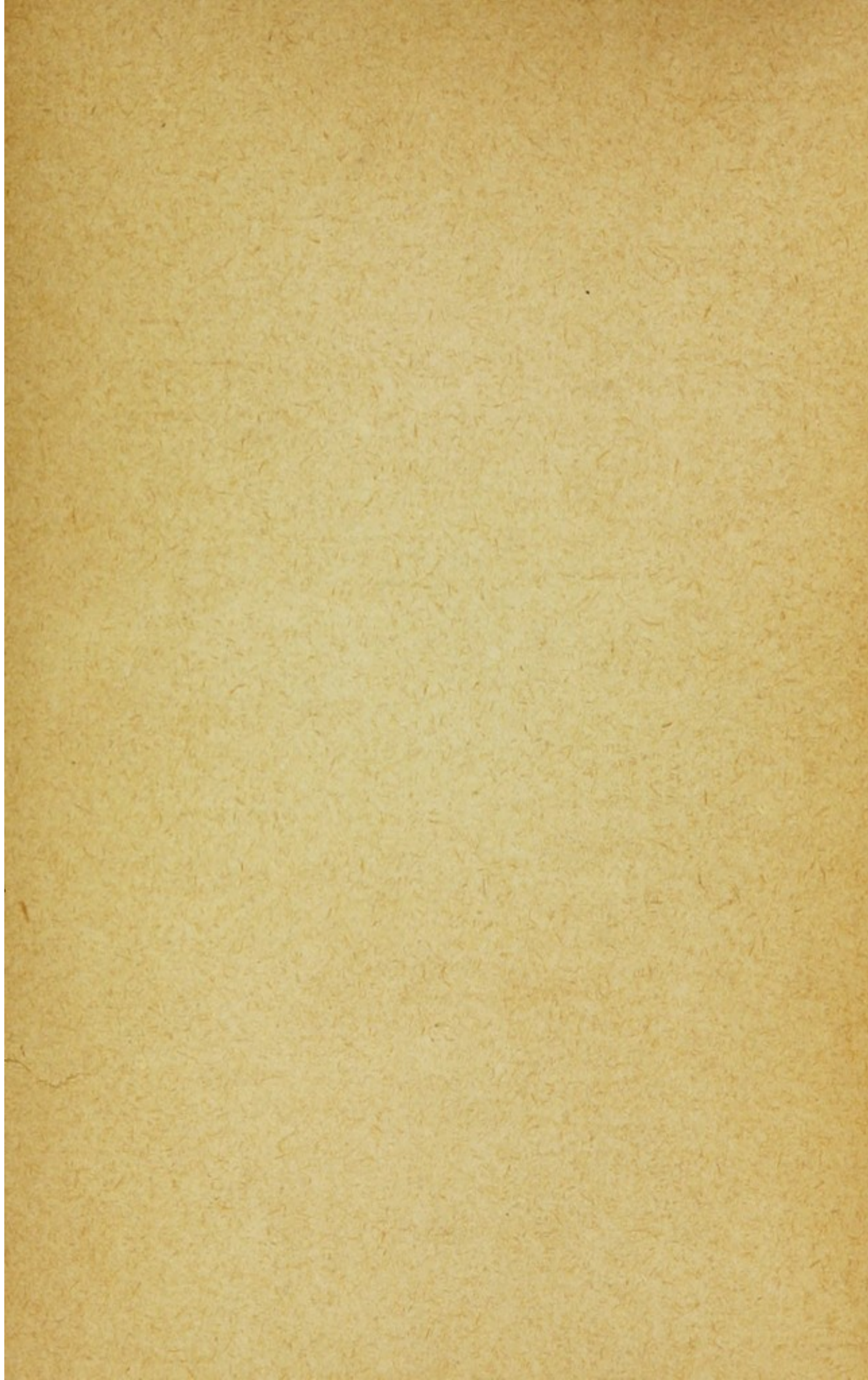
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The asylum scenes and incidents do not refer to, nor are the strictures directed against, any particular asylum or asylums. If I have been associated with one asylum more than another, I wish to state distinctly that no reference is made to it in this book, nor to its doctors, staff, inmates, or Committee. My purpose is to pillory pernicious systems.

I know not if there is a place called Rudford. If there be, neither it nor its asylum, if it have one, are referred to in these pages. The name Northshire was chosen quite arbitrarily; Southshire, or a county at any other point of the compass would have served equally well.

The individuals in the book do not indicate living persons, but characters, and if there be people of such names they are not referred to in this novel. Also the description of the vicinity and architecture, etc., of Rudford Asylum are entirely imaginary.



IN A COUNTY ASYLUM

CHAPTER I

DR. ROGERS grunted angrily as he perused a curt note he had just received from a profitable patient.

"It's no good, Fownes," he exclaimed testily, "it won't do at all. You must smooth them down, lie to them, and listen to all their nonsense patiently. I know this woman," tapping the letter with his forefinger, "has nothing the matter with her, but you mustn't tell her so. I shall soon have no practice left if you go on like this."

Dr. Fownes read the letter. It expressed a wish for the doctor's account, and an intimation that no further visits were required. His hasty temperament resented his senior's tone.

"If you think that," he retorted, "the sooner I clear out the better. I only told the woman to get up and walk half-a-dozen miles. She's simply shamming in order to be fussed over and examined."

"There's no need to lose your temper," said Dr. Rogers, "just listen to me quietly for a moment. As you know, this is not an isolated case. You have lost me a considerable number of good patients in a precisely similar way. You're much too blunt and impatient, you can't control your tongue or your temper. In short, Fownes," he concluded, "you're not fitted for general practice."

“ Thank-you,” with a wry smile, “ but what the devil am I fitted for ? ” And Fownes paced impatiently across the spacious consulting room. His employer’s vexation cooled, and he eyed the younger man quizzically. His impetuous assistant had been in his service now for six months, and though undoubtedly well up in his work, he had been an unqualified failure.

“ If I might venture to advise you,” remarked Rogers after a pause, “ I should suggest some service or other, such as the R.A.M.C., Lunacy, or the Poor Law. You could say more or less what you liked to your patients then ! Of course, I should be sorry to lose you. I think, considering your disposition—— ”

“ Oh, stow that,” snapped Fownes, “ damn my disposition ! However,” he added more quietly, “ thanks for your advice. I’ll go and have a smoke and think it over.”

He left the room and went into his own sanctum, a very different apartment to the gorgeous consulting room. He filled his pipe thoughtfully, lit a match, and in a brown study held it until it burnt his fingers, and then swore. So Dr. Rogers had, in effect, dismissed him. This was the outcome of his hopes of succeeding in general practice—of being ultimately taken into partnership. And yet his mortification was not unmixed with a sense of relief.

After all, what had his life been since he had become an assistant ? A round of unsatisfactory drudgery. Dr. Rogers possessed a large practice, and conducted it upon strictly economical lines.

He was on the panel for his district and had three thousand insured persons on his list. In addition he was Poor Law Medical Officer. And lastly, he enjoyed the approval of the neighbourhood as manifested by a large and flourishing private practice.

The care of the two former branches naturally fell to Fownes' lot. He was also entrusted with the treatment of the less wealthy private patients, and occasionally of one of the elect, *i.e.*, well-to-do.

This very desirable division of labour between Dr. Rogers and his assistant worked admirably—for the former's pocket, which, of course, is the main thing. And the patients themselves, that is, those that mattered, appeared charmed. Even those delegated to Fownes' custody enjoyed considerable attention at his hands, though not so much as Dr. Rogers could have wished. For his stupid assistant would persist in bestowing his services unduly upon the insured persons and paupers, whose only purpose surely, was to bring in a nice little annual income for his principal in return for as little work as possible. A child would have perceived the impossibility of adequately looking after a moderate private practice (such as Fownes' share of Dr. Rogers' amounted to) and three thousand insured persons, not to mention the paupers. Yet, during the busy season of the year, Fownes was constantly at work, struggling vainly to accomplish conscientiously the unequal task allotted to him. It is needless to state which classes of patients suffered neglect, despite his efforts. He had somewhat

trembled to think what would happen if any epidemic disease arose. Being new to his work he was singular enough to worry about the enforced inadequacy of his attention to the non-paying patients.

During the "slack season" he might have enjoyed the panel practice. It would have afforded him useful experience had he had a free hand in prescribing remedies. But there was unfortunately in existence, a list of what are known as "stock mixtures," for the delectation of the insured, mixtures agreed upon by the local panel doctors and chemists. This institution saved both these classes of gentlemen a good deal of trouble, the former ordered "mist A.B.C.," which the latter kept ready concocted in two-gallon jars. Let me explain further what a stock mixture is. It is a sort of universal cure-all, consisting of a little of a couple or so of more or less inert drugs, and a very great deal of water. In Dr. Rogers' panel area there were some six different stock mixtures in vogue, devoted respectively to respiratory, digestive, febrile affections, etc. (when the busy prescriber had time to relegate his patient's ailments into any of these perhaps somewhat wide categories). Six stock mixtures for six hundred ailments, each somewhat diverse in every patient! John Fownes was limited in his prescribing for panel patients to these six concoctions. But stay! I am not quite accurate. A few of the insured persons, relations of private patients, Dr. Rogers permitted to enjoy special privileges. Need I say why? These chosen

people, dependant relatives, mothers, aunts, daughters, of the well-to-do persons with whom they lived, and called for the purposes of the Insurance Act housekeepers, nursery-governesses, or what not, received what medicine they liked, whether they needed it or not. For example, they indulged greedily in expensive proprietary "tonics," stimulants, pills, etc., at the tax-payers' expense, and Fownes, at his principal's orders, duly prescribed these under the Act. But he hated it all, the time-enforced neglect of the sick many, the time-serving pampering of the healthy few.

Then the paupers, which he treated in virtue of Dr. Rogers' tenure as Poor Law Medical Officer, what of them? For the most part these were continually imbibing medicine, not, perhaps, of the most efficacious kind, but medicine nevertheless, because they liked taking it, and felt it was their right. Moreover, it was less trouble to dose them all incessantly, that is, those who wished it, with dilute mixtures, than to find out which of them really needed it.

So Fownes was not enamoured of this branch of the practice.

Some idea of his experiences among his better class patients the reader will have gathered.

Thoughts of this nature occupied Fownes' mind as he sat smoking in his room, and went far to reconcile him to his failure, for he did not doubt the truth of Dr. Rogers' strictures. He felt very disinclined to further ventures in the sphere of general practice.

Then his thoughts turned to a subject infinitely dearer to him even than his work, but intimately associated with it and its scene of action—a subject that filled him with mingled exultation and shame. The woman he had always loved still cared for him, though she was beyond his legitimate reach. He wondered if the impending change in his life could be made to further his aims centreing in her. He flushed darkly as, for the first time, he admitted to himself the nature of those aims. He knew now that he could not continue to live in almost daily contact with her and conduct himself with the necessary decorum and restraint. Nor could he keep away. Was not this an opportunity to end a situation that had become intolerable, to end it according to his own desires? His teeth bit deeply into the stem of his pipe. He would make it so.

Dr. Rogers had suggested a service of some kind, or a post in an institution. Would such serve his purpose? A hospital post was mere beggary. It would barely support one. Services in the narrower sense were incompatible with his determination. A workhouse infirmary or an asylum would pay better. Then a specious idea struck him. He got up and paced the room in anxious thought. Presently he stopped, seized that week's copy of the *British Medical Journal*, and eagerly scanned the advertisement columns. He threw it aside, and looked at the *Lancet*. That journal was equally unfruitful. He resolved to question Dr. Rogers. That reminded him of his work. He looked at the

clock, cursed the practice, and went out to continue his endless round of visits.

* * * * *

Dr. Fownes' present post was his first since qualification. His father, a moderately prosperous country solicitor, had died, after saving enough money to purchase an annuity for his wife, and to defray the cost of his son's professional education.

Now the Honourable Algernon Dayncourt was squire of John Fownes' native village. He was blessed with two daughters. There was a scandal in connection with the elder, Eileen, and a farmer's son, and she suddenly disappeared from home. Young Fownes' acquaintance with her was limited to modest cap-lifting at the age of ten, for, of course, the noble Dayncourts held no social intercourse with the solicitor's family.

When there are but three educated families in an English village, no person of sense would expect them for a moment to know each other on a footing of equality.

Nevertheless, John Fownes was destined to play an important part in the life of the squire's younger daughter, Alice. They met at the gatherings of the village dramatic society, during the Cambridge vacations, and fell mutually in love. (Oh! exalted parents, beware of such distressingly mixed assemblies.) This affection culminated in a secret understanding, and John returned to his work animated by a great determination to make a position worthy of her sharing. Then, about a year before he became qualified as a doctor, Alice suddenly married

a clergyman of good family and large means, rejoicing in the name of Boyne.

This was a crushing blow to John. It caused him to abandon his work at the hospital and leave the country. He was enabled to do so by obtaining a post as travelling companion to a neurotic old gentleman with proclivities to alcoholism and indiscriminate charity. He duly accompanied his patient to the Malay States, and eventually handed him over to the very solicitous care of his children in I'erak !

Subsequently, reckless and miserable, John led an irregular life, earning his bread in turn by dispensing for an English doctor, contributing to the local Press, and by serving at sea before the mast. But after a few months he became disgusted with this mode of life, and checked himself. He examined his own state of mind, his future prospects, and realised that his efforts to forget his sweetheart were fruitless, that his fashion of living was deteriorating him.

The upshot was that he returned to England, and went home to his mother. But the familiar environment of the village only served to increase his longing to see Alice again, so, to escape from it, he went back to his hospital. At the end of a year he took his degree.

The distraction of mental work over, his craving reasserted itself with redoubled force. He felt that at any cost he must, nay, would, see his former sweetheart once more, even though it were the last time. Her husband was vicar of a West London

suburb, and John was aware of their locality. So, one day, schooling himself to be outwardly calm, and to betray no feeling other than that proper to an old friend, he presented himself at her house.

As luck would have it, Alice's husband was out, engaged in some parochial work. The meeting between the erstwhile lovers was painfully constrained; his manner was cold from the necessity of an iron grip upon his passion; she was nervous, secretly ashamed, and obviously unhappy. They conversed spasmodically upon indifferent topics for a long quarter-of-an-hour, when tea was brought in. Soon after, her husband returned.

Fownes was introduced as an old acquaintance from her village, and was cordially greeted by the clergyman. Mr. Boyne took a distinct liking to John, and expressed the hope, evidently sincere, that he should make his better acquaintance.

The inevitable result followed.

This visit was the first of many. Alice Boyne and John Fownes drifted by imperceptible gradations into their old relationship of lovers. No love, however, was expressed; the proprieties were strictly observed—nothing but a handshake at meeting or parting passing between them. The clergyman knew nothing of his wife's former love affair, and regarding the doctor as a mutual friend, was always pleased to welcome him. The latter, for his part, lived for these visits, and Alice's old attachment grew into a deep affection.

Through Mr. Boyne's good offices, John obtained his assistantship to Dr. Rogers, who was the

Boynes' medical attendant, as well as for many years the London adviser to the Dayncourts.

Ever since his first visit to Alice Boyne, John had been gradually losing control of a passion that he could not fail to see was reciprocated with equal intensity. Finally, a week before the interview recorded at the beginning of this narrative, Alice had wept on his shoulder, and they had confessed **their** love to one another.

Since then her life had been darkened by an ever-present self-reproach and remorse, but John left the house with a thought in his heart from which, a few months ago, he would have shrunk with disgust and shame. As the days passed, the possibility of his betraying another's wife became a familiar idea—a thought that grew into an aspiration.

We have seen what circumstances gave this aim shape and converted it into a definite plan. The substance of John's scheme was to become an A.M.O. at an asylum or infirmary, and to prevail upon Alice to leave her husband and obtain the first appointment as nurse that became vacant there.

At dinner on the day our story opened, Fownes told Dr. Rogers of his decision to take up asylum or poor law work, and enquired if he knew of any vacancy.

Rogers thought for a moment before replying :

“ Not that would suit you ; but I'll have a look round for you.”

“ Do you mind telling me about any that would not suit me ? ” asked John, knowing his man.

Rogers frowned slightly.

"It is true," he said, rather reluctantly, "I know of one. I was referring to the deficiencies in the job, not to your own shortcomings."

"Well, let's hear them, and then I can judge for myself if they are serious. Where is the place?"

"Other end of the country—Northshire—small county asylum, dull hole," replied Rogers, between sips at his coffee.

"And the drawbacks?"

"Well, the salary is poor, namely £120; the medical superintendent is youngish and without much influence. You would be the only A.M.O., and lead the existence of a monk. To be candid, Fownes," he added seriously, "to a man of action the life would be intolerable. There is very little society, not much work to do—and what there is, is deadly monotonous. There's too much time to think, no prospect of advancement for years, no possibility of marriage. But, in short, every opportunity and inducement to go to the devil."

John pondered this diatribe awhile, and found that he was not much impressed by it, for his conception of the future included the companionship of Alice Boyne. On the contrary, this place seemed singularly favourable to his project.

"You know the superintendent personally?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, an old friend," returned Rogers. "But haven't I said enough to damn the post? You'd not stick it a month, Fownes. Give up the idea."

“What sort of man is he,” pursued John, “gone to the devil, I suppose?”

Rogers opened his eyes, then, recalling his own remark, he smiled rather doubtfully.

“He was not A.M.O. there,” he said. “He is a good fellow, but rather a recluse. If you are counting on his society you are wrong, because, though he is unmarried, he has a household of his own. Moreover, your official relations would prevent much intimacy.”

“Could you get me the berth?”

“If you are really bent on it I could try,” was the grudging reply, “but you’d be better advised to wait for a more favourable opening. Where’s the hurry? I’ve got to get another assistant before you go, remember.”

“Of course, that is understood,” said John. “I’m much obliged—and all that sort of thing—I think I should like your asylum, at any rate for a time.”

“Very well,” returned Rogers, with resignation, “er—as it were—*De gustibus non est disputandum.*”

“Will you write and recommend me for the billet soon?” John asked; “I want to get it settled.”

“Well,” remarked Rogers, growing sententious over his port, “I suppose I must. They say counsel is given to be ignored. It costs nothing, so it can’t be worth much, always excepting the legal and medical varieties, which, with the affecting fellowship of thieves, invariably contradict the first clause of this axiom.”

“ It is always silly to give advice, but to give good advice is absolutely fatal,” quoted John inaccurately, “ to the doctor’s pocket,” he added slyly.

“ Cynicism,” observed the other, “ emanates naturally from the young, but is unbecoming notwithstanding. Our noble profession was begotten by philanthropy, conceived of knowledge, nurtured by self-sacrifice and taught by art, and it has grown up into a bucket-shop ! ”

“ Oh, hang it ! ” said John deprecatingly, “ it’s not so bad as that. I’m sure a lot of medical men do do charitable things, and—er—feel a sense of duty—and that sort of thing ; you know what I mean. One does like to help the poor beggars and, ah—be of some use—— ” And John flushed and felt uncomfortable after this ineloquent protest.

“ Very unfortunate sentiments, albeit very explicitly put,” grinned Rogers ironically, “ but luckily easily cured by time. Why, my dear enthusiast,” he went on, “ before the National Insurance Act, there may have been a few men such as you mention ; now they are more bitter and keener after their rights than anyone. And who blames ‘em ? We’re all the same now, in all walks of life. The Act has unmasked our profession, that’s all.”

“ Rot ! ” remarked John disrespectfully.

“ The services,” continued the other, “ are the swagger things to go in for. That’s the reason men do it. Who ever looked for patriotism in a dance-infatuated guardsman ? The pursuit of the law is essentially selfish and immoral. Look at the plums to be had by toadying to a Government. No one

is fool enough to think a lawyer cares a damn about the justice or morality of his causes. Literature as a calling is degrading, a man sells his sacred emotions and loftiest thoughts to the highest bidder, that is, of course, if he has any. The Church is a comfortable way of leading an idle and useless life, and yet of being somebody to whom fools look up. Trade is avowedly dishonest, everyone suspects his butcher of trying to over-reach him, and rightly. The paternal squire is a legend, at least in the metaphorical sense! Look at our friend Dayncourt. He ejects his tenants if they don't attend his church, and mulcts 'em in exorbitant rents whether they do or not.

"No, my young friend, do not look for altruism. They are all out for the shekels, so why should medicine give herself airs and pretend to philanthropic motives?"

"I don't believe you know any more about Dayncourt than you really believe all that 'bilge,'" said John bluntly.

"You are wrong," replied Rogers. "I have treated his high, great, and mightiness at intervals for years. He's gouty. At his best he's a hard old nut to crack, but when he gets an acute attack, he's the very devil!"

"Sometimes he condescends to talk to me about the deplorable spread of Radicalism, and its dangers to the stability and authority of the Church and Crown. The usual good old clap-trap, you know. He means the diminution of his own authority in his village."

“ How did you bag such a swell as a patient ? ” asked John.

“ I ought to reply with dignity, ‘ by merit,’ but I know few customers come into her shop,” answered Rogers. “ As a matter of fact, I have the fates to thank. The old reprobate was in a carriage accident outside here, and was brought in to me. That’s twenty years ago. He was only shaken, but developed traumatic neurasthenia, for which I advised Weir-Mitchell treatment in a nursing home. As this enabled him to get away from his wife, he has been grateful to me ever since ! ”

“ I don’t believe a word of it,” said John. “ He is a fine old chap, very proud, of course, but honourable and just. And I know for a fact he was very fond of his family ; it was talked of in the village.”

“ Therefore,” remarked Rogers, “ to be discredited.”

“ Look here,” said John, “ I’ll play you two hundred up. You never talk, thank goodness, over billiards.”

“ See how youth scorns the wisdom of—er, well not exactly age, ‘ *experientia doc—*’ ”

But John was gone.

Dr. Rogers sat still until he estimated that the other had had time to light the gas, and take the cover off the table, then in a leisurely fashion made for the billiard-room.

As Dr. Rogers was executing, with much glee, a brilliant series of flukes, his page-boy appeared and delivered a message to the effect that Dr. Fownes was wanted.

“ What is it ? ” asked Rogers.

“ A panel patient wants the doctor to visit 'im, sir.”

“ What ! at this time of night ? ”

“ The messenger says 'e's bad, sir.”

“ What's the matter ? ” asked Fownes.

“ Got a bad throat, 'e says, sir.”

“ What infernal cheek to come along now ! ” exploded Rogers.

“ Say we can't come till the morning, and you just tell him that the Act says he's got to let us know before 10 a.m. on the day he wants visiting.”

The boy left the room.

“ ‘ Except in cases of urgency, ’ ” supplemented Fownes.

“ What is a case of urgency ? ” asked Rogers cynically. “ I've never met one in a panellite yet ! . . . Let me see now, I'd made fifteen by scintillating ‘ losers ’ . . . ”

Subject for our readers' debating society—“ Is a panel doctor the best judge of the urgency of a case he has never seen ? ”

CHAPTER II

THE Reverend James Boyne was an austere, intellectual, young man, with a constitutional contempt for people of lesser mental capacity or virtue. From a sense of Christian duty he endeavoured to conceal this feeling, but so obviously, that less immaculate persons were more exasperated than by open scorn. He was the soul of rectitude and respectability, and expected others to live up—or down, if you prefer it—to his standard. But beneath a calm imperturbable manner, and blameless external conduct, beat a heart, not cold, but arrogant and vindictive. He loved power, and the respect and deference of his fellows; so he took Holy Orders. It was his pleasure to shape and bend others, and to contemplate the products of his influence and moulding; so he obtained a living among a large necessitous population, and devoted himself heart and brain to their moral education and elevation. It was his work, not God's.

Next to his work came his wife. Though undoubtedly fond of her, he had long concluded that she fell short of his stature, both in aims and ability. So he proceeded to mould her. But, strangely enough, this disciplinary exercise had been an utter failure.

His opinion of her was perfectly plain to his wife,

with the result that she was constantly on the defensive. Being a girl of spirit, she resented his training, and attitude of tacit disapproval, at first by tears, then open temper, and finally by sarcasm and cutting remarks. He on his part gradually dropped the mask of tolerance, and made no attempt to hide his disapprobation, irritating her alternately by rebukes, and condescending attempts at conciliation.

This antagonism between them had been developing for some months. Mr. Boyne could not understand his wife's conduct, but he fought against the animosity it raised in his heart. I will leave my readers to apportion the blame justly. Given a certain measure of mutual affection these two would have contrived to live together fairly comfortably, as hundreds of similarly mated couples do. But Alice Boyne did not love her husband. She had once imagined she did.

They first met when he became "locum tenens" for the vicar of her native parish. Mr. Boyne conceived an ardent passion for the sunny-haired ingenuous girl who helped him in the social side of the parish work. She was undoubtedly pretty, of extremely good birth, and sufficiently well-endowed with this world's goods—even for a clergyman. But it must be said, in justice to him, that the two latter considerations weighed very little with him at the time. He was smitten by her beauty. Had she been a village maid, his passion might possibly have produced other results than it did. She was an impressionable girl of nineteen, flattered by the attentions of a man she regarded as a species of

saint. Her love for John Fownes was hardly more to her than a romantic girl and boy attachment; her father would, of course, never consent to her marriage with a poor doctor, and, in fact, knew nothing about their affection. On the other hand, Mr. Boyne was the nephew of an earl, and possessed five thousand pounds a year.

She had no valid reasons to urge why she should not marry the clergyman, so her somewhat half-hearted objections were eventually over-ruled by her father. So she married Mr. Boyne, and had he been the man she thought him, the marriage would probably have been passably successful. As it was, after a few months, though his affection had cooled little, he was disillusioned, and she regarded him with aversion.

On the evening of the day on which John Fownes received his virtual dismissal from Dr. Roger's service, Mr. Boyne and his wife were seated in uncongenial silence before their drawing-room fire, killing, in their usual manner, the half-hour preceding a service at church. She was in a mood of ill-suppressed irritation. His feelings were wounded. His efforts to make conversation, suitable as he considered to her level of intelligence, had been met by frigid irony upon her side. So he took refuge in his *Church Times*, with a feeling of unmerited injury and righteous indignation plainly written upon his face. Had she any affection for him, this would have exasperated her more, but now her only sensation was one of relief. His silence left her free to pursue the uneasy current of her thoughts.

The servant's announcement of "Dr. Fownes," was greeted by the clergyman with involuntary relief. He was weary of adopting an impressive demeanour which he found now left his wife entirely unmoved.

In Alice's heart apprehension, shame, and gladness struggled for predominance.

Fownes entered the room quickly, shook hands with them both, and subsided into a chair, studiously keeping his eyes off Alice. His assumed air of nonchalance was belied by his flushed face and unnaturally bright eyes.

"Rotten night, raining buckets," he remarked lightly.

"I trust you did not get wet," said the clergyman.

"No, not to-night, thanks," replied Fownes, "but I got absolutely drowned last week going home from a night call. How's the parish going?"

"Not too badly," answered Boyne affably, "but I am kept well employed. As you are aware, my parishoners number among them the majority of the ne'er-do-wells of the district, and it is uphill work instilling even the elements of ethics into them."

He liked to talk to John about his work, and cherished a hope of influencing him for "good." He knew John never went to church.

So they conversed about parochial affairs and kindred matters, and Fownes talked feverishly to maintain a dialogue between Boyne and himself. He dared not trust himself to address Alice.

Presently Boyne looked at his watch.

"I am sorry," said he, "that I can only give you another five minutes. I have a service at which my presence is indispensable. But you must stay to supper, and we will continue our discussion on my return. In the meantime, my wife will, er, amuse you. Perhaps you will sing to Dr. Fownes, Alice," turning to her.

This was the only way he thought it possible for her to amuse anybody.

Alice roused herself from the reverie into which she had fallen.

"Certainly," she said absently. "I hope Dr. Fownes will stay."

Of course, Fownes knew Boyne had a service to-night. He was chafing with impatience, and waiting only for it.

At last the clergyman, with an iterated apology, betook himself to his service.

"Thank God!" said John, drawing a deep breath, as the vicar closed the door behind him. Then he turned and looked at Alice. She looked pale and sad, and gazed wistfully into the fire. It was the first time John had seen her since their confession of love, a week ago. He was only conscious of a feeling of exultation, all his irritation was gone. He even forgot for the moment the reason for his visit, the joy of being alone with the woman he worshipped, effacing all else.

How much pleasanter it would have been to narrate the outpouring of his affection into legitimate channels! If, after being thrown over by

Alice, he had bestowed his heart and hand upon Miss Flower, the village baker's daughter, how charming it would have been ! Think of her joy at capturing a doctor, of her parents' triumph at the elevation such a marriage would cause in their social status in the village. Picture John's complacency over her fat money-bags, and her pride (heaven help us !) as she invariably alluded to her husband as " the doctor."

But had such a happy event occurred this history would never have been written. We should have been privileged instead to chronicle (if we *would* write) how the new Mrs. Fownes " cut " all her old friends, how the vicar, after much conjugal discussion, called upon her (a thing he never did to her-parents, poor wretches). We should have revelled in the fascinating details of village gossip, and the broad and lofty views of people limited intellectually by its horizon.

So, as spectators of our young people's present folly, to them the most serious thing in the world, let us be as patient as we can. We promise, then, to bring upon the stage a highly moral person, for you, o cynic, to gibe at, and to soothe the susceptibility of the strait-laced.

He watched her with ardent eyes, scanning every feature with eager intensity. The light from the fire threw into strong relief her perfectly oval face, framed by simply coiffured golden-brown hair. Her heavy white lids partially hid deep blue eyes, and lips made for smiles drooped piteously at the corners. Her hands were clasped in her lap, but

the white fingers were continually agitated by nervous movements.

"Alice," he said timidly.

"Well, John?"

Then he stopped. How could he begin? How offend this pure mind by the proposition in his heart? Like a cold douche the absolute impossibility and hopelessness of his project overwhelmed him. An involuntary groan broke from him.

She looked up quickly and saw the misery in his eyes; then hastily away and bit her lip.

There was silence again.

John gripped the arms of his chair.

"I am leaving Dr. Rogers," he said in a voice that sounded cold from suppressed emotion.

She started slightly and paled. "Yes," she said in the same tone.

"Did you know then?"

"No, but it is right that you should do so."

"'Right,' good God!"

"It is not a pleasant prospect"—his voice shook—"at all events to me."

No answer.

"Alice, do you not care, then?"

"Is there any need to answer that, John? What I care does not matter; it cannot alter things." She said this with obvious effort.

John drew a deep breath.

"What you care means everything to me," he said, "either hell or heaven."

No reply again.

"Do you not hear, Alice?"

“ Why do you talk in this strain, John ? ” she asked wearily.

“ Why ! ” Passion flushed his cheek and fired his eyes. Then he made a tactical blunder. He leaned towards her and poured out a stream of ardent love.

Alice listened with a face of stone.

“ My dearest, ” he ended in a whisper, “ let us begin life afresh together and forget these two miserable years. ”

She unconsciously shook her head. He got up and passed his hand across his forehead, breathing heavily.

“ My temper is not a gentle one, Alice, ” he said with ominous quietude. Then, after a pause which she was careful not to break, “ But if, if you were mistaken . . . carried away . . . last week when you said you loved me, I would rather know . . . now, at once. ”

Alice had profited by her experience, and remained silent ; her previous attempt to reason had only provoked his passion. John went over to her and, putting his hands on her shoulders, turned her towards him.

“ Well ? ” he said unsteadily.

She looked at him full. “ You know I love you, ” she said bravely, “ but we must all lie on the beds we have made. ”

“ Why ? ” said John, expressing unconsciously the eternal query of the whole human race. His anger was taking him by the hair, his hands on her shoulders shook visibly. Then Alice took one of them with gentle fingers and held it.

“Sit down, John,” she said firmly, despite tremulous lips. “Now look me in the face—squarely!”

John obeyed wondering.

For a long moment they looked into each other's eyes, then his fell, and with something like a sob he kneeled and hid his face in her lap.

CHAPTER III

AT this moment the Rev. James Boyne, wearing his habitual patronising smile, entered the room. He stopped dead, turned very white, and gripped the table for support. His eyes dilated with horrified surprise. He tried to speak, but his contracted lips refused to articulate.

Fownes sprang to his feet with an oath, but Alice did not stir. Her husband quickly regained his presence of mind, and outward composure. His thoughts flowed rapidly; everything seemed clear to him—the affection he had surprised in his wife's face, the position in which he found her, her changed attitude of late toward himself—Fownes' presence this evening—could only mean, were indubitable proof to his mind, of guilt. His colour changed from white to red, and then to dull crimson. His eyes glittered savagely, and the trembling of his hand shook the ornaments on the table he still grasped. But his voice was hard and even, as he addressed his wife.

“Oblige me by leaving the room, Alice,” he said.

Alice had been watching him, and her mind had also been working. She rose, and faced her husband.

“What do you mean—what are you thinking?”

His eyes told her. She turned pale in her turn, but remained composed, and eyed him gravely.

“It is not true,” she said slowly. “There is no more than you have seen. Can you believe that?”

He merely motioned her towards the door.

“We love each other,” continued Alice quietly, “but he only told me last time he was here. That is wrong, I know, but there our guilt ends.” She still kept her eyes on Boyne’s face. “I feel I ought to tell you this,” she added. “Do you believe it?”

“She is as innocent as a babe!” broke in Fownes vehemently.

Boyne smiled satirically, but his lips twitched with suppressed passion. He ignored Fownes’ remark, and replied to his wife:

“Can you expect it?” he asked.

With her fair head held high, and a settled purpose in her eyes, Alice composedly left the room.

Then Boyne’s unnatural colour left his cheeks and he sat down. He appeared suddenly much older, and his stricken face caused Fownes to turn away with a furious imprecation, an imprecation in which was concentrated a world of disappointment, misery and hate—hatred of himself as well as of the unhappy man behind him, and bitter rebellion against his fate.

The clergyman glanced up and a look of surprise crossed his face. But this was only transitory. Fownes stared despairingly out of the window, unconscious of the other’s scrutiny. Presently, struck by the vicar’s silence and inactivity, he turned round. At the expression in the eyes he encountered, all his self-reproach vanished, and his face

darkened. He clenched his fist and made a step towards Boyne, only to grow suddenly cold and strangely limp. The strain had told heavily upon him. The pallor of his face was reflected intensified in that of the clergyman.

At last the latter spoke. "Go," he said simply. And without a word Fownes went.

So these two separated with savage enmity in their hearts—a hatred infinitely deeper from its denial of all expression. Better for them both had they given it rein. Better for Fownes, because violent words would have mitigated its intensity in his mind ; immeasurably better for the vicar had he exhausted himself by recriminations, for this self-suppression sowed seeds in his brain, the final fruition of which no man might foretell. But the immediate disturbance of a shallow, unwholesome soil by the planting of the germ, produced direct overt results. He got up, clutching at his collar for air, then with a peculiar high-pitched cry, lurched sideways on to the floor.

It was half-past ten when John, dazed and shaken, left Boyne's house. Shivering as he encountered the chill night air and driving rain, he walked rapidly out of the garden, and turned automatically towards home. He strode half-way up the street, and shivered again violently before he realised that he had come away without his overcoat. His evening clothes were already saturated, and his shirt hung clammily against his chest. He returned to Boyne's house, and finding the front door open, as he had left it, walked in. He took his

coat from the hall-stand, and put it on in a leisurely fashion, taking his usual care to protect his collar—now a limp wisp of linen—by adjusting a silk neckerchief round it. He heard no sound, and leaving the house unchallenged, once more turned his steps homeward.

His mind refused to dwell upon the events of the evening, but busied itself instead with passing external impressions. He noticed how absurdly alike the trim red brick villas appeared in the glare of the street arc-lights, how accurately their bedroom short blinds corresponded with those of their neighbours. He speculated idly about the occupants of the more inharmoniously painted houses, and wondered how anyone could display such execrable taste. He observed the sparsity of lighted windows, thinking with amused pity of people going to bed so early.

A sharp surprised cry in a woman's voice issued from a lighted bedroom window near him. He nodded comprehendingly. "Midder case," he murmured, and stopped a moment, watching the moving shadows on the blind. The cry was renewed more indistinctly, and ended in a hilarious shout, followed by a smothered laugh. "Chloroform," said he, lingering with a certain feeling of anxiety. A strong shiver made his teeth chatter, but when it subsided he did not feel cold. His ear caught a metallic clinking from the lighted room, and he listened eagerly. Then almost immediately came a gurgling piping cry. He sighed with relief.

"Good man," said he, "quick work."

All at once he staggered, and clutched the iron railings of the front garden. Holding to these he lowered his head until the faintness passed off.

"Must get some brandy," he muttered, "faint."

He turned down the first side street he came to, and luckily found a small public house. He pushed open the door engraved "Private Bar," and entered. The hot atmosphere caused a return of his faintness, and he sat down suddenly on the nearest bench.

"Brandy and soda," he requested thickly. The barmaid, with the kindness of heart characteristic of her class, seeing he was unwell, ceased serving some others, to bring John his draught. He swallowed it eagerly, felt better, and thanked her with a smile.

"Another, please," he said. Then, looking idly round the bar, he found the other occupants staring curiously at him. He felt feebly amused. One of the drinkers, appearing rather concerned, asked with rough pity,

"What's up, mate? Ain't you well?"

"I'm all right," said John shortly.

"Not 'alf you ain't," rejoined the other, "why, you're as red as a beetroot, your eyes is boiled lookin', yer trousers all muddy, and you're wet through."

John found that the latter part of this statement at least was true, and he noticed apathetically that his overcoat was undone.

Presently, feeling hot and parched, he got up, and went out into the grateful rain. He made his way

half-consciously towards home, but was forced to rest at intervals, owing to dyspnoea, and a sharp pain in his side. Arrived there, he collapsed exhausted into a chair in the hall, and was found by Dr. Rogers later, delirious, and shivering, with a temperature of 104°.

“Pneumonia,” remarked Rogers, laconically, “last week’s soaking. Just my luck.”

* * * * *

The Rev. James Boyne emerged from the fit in which he had fallen, confused, and giddy, and sat down unsteadily on the sofa. He had a vague idea that he had fainted, and it was some moments before the events preceding his fall began to recur to his mind. He recalled first the presence of Fownes, their quarrel, next the part played by his wife, and then the incidents of the evening were spread completely before him by his memory. And the rising tide of a deep misery overwhelmed him. Need we follow the unhappy thoughts of an afflicted egoist? It would be a thankless task. Distress and misfortune compel our sympathy only when their victims inspire our respect or esteem. Thus men differ from God.

Let us simply chronicle the decision to which he was led. He would bury the past and ostensibly forgive his wife. No lofty affection contributed to this resolve. It was but the outcome of egoism and desire.

With characteristic benevolence, he decided to allow his wife to remain in ignorance of his magnanimity until the morrow. He went upstairs to bed,

smiling as he passed her door, and heard her moving about the room.

“Her conscience will not let her sleep,” he thought. “She’ll take no harm from a night of self-reproach.”

Then he got into bed, after reciting his usual prayer, and fell to wondering how he could get Fownes dismissed from his post without revealing his own secret.

CHAPTER IV

JOHN FOWNES' illness proved to be a sharp attack of pneumonia. For the first week he was too ill to dwell upon his trouble, even when able to think coherently; during the second, weakness rendered him indifferent to everything, but, as he regained strength, the unpleasant realities of life crowded back into his consciousness. It is always irksome to take up the thread of everyday life after a serious illness. One is weak and despondent, and even minor troubles loom large. John's predominant feeling was a feverish anxiety to know what had transpired since the memorable night at the Boynes'. His apprehension was for Alice. What course had her husband adopted? How had he treated her?

John was somewhat ashamed of his own conduct, but now that he was no longer under Alice's softening influence, he was by no means prepared to relinquish his plan. He was determined to continue their intercourse, but for the present, at least, upon an innocent footing, as he understood it. Their meetings should be clandestine in future, and he would trust to the influence of time and his affection to overcome Alice's opposition. In the interval he would have to content himself with hoping for Boyne's death. He was quite frank on that point, and prayed for a railway accident, or something

to rid them of the clergyman. The remoteness of this possibility did not raise his spirits.

The first day he was able to leave his bed, some three weeks after the onset of his illness, he wrote to Alice. It was a humble letter, full of anxious love, and imploring forgiveness for his importunity; he begged her to write to him at once, and allay his anxiety. Nor was this hypocrisy. He felt it all at the moment, as he recalled so vividly their conversation before Boyne returned. He was sorry he had pained her, but more sorry that she had been so pained, by his proposal.

A few days later Dr. Rogers came into John's room with a business-like air. Noticing the latter's depression, he had refrained from worrying him as yet with practical things. To-day, however, he decided to clear up a few questions outstanding between them.

"Glad you're looking better," he said. "Do you mind if we talk shop a bit to-day?"

"Not at all. Go ahead," said Fownes cheerfully.

"That's better. Now we'll start right away. Before you crocked up we had agreed that I should write Smith, at Rudford, about your going there. Of course, under the circumstances, I did not write, so you can reconsider that. Now, as you know," continued Rogers, "I have had a locum since then, and I may tell you that he is doing very well, moreover, he wants to stay on as my assistant. So I think it would be only fair to——"

"To be no longer your assistant in name, as I am no longer, in fact," interrupted Fownes. "Quite.

Why should you pay two when only one works ? ”

“ Er—exactly,” replied the older man. “ With your usual sledge-hammer bluntness you hit the nail on the head. Now look here, Fownes,” he went on, “ you had better change your mind about Smith’s Asylum, and look out at once for something else ; in the meantime you are very welcome to stay here as my *guest*.”

“ Thank-you,” said Fownes, slowly, “ I should like a few days to decide finally. I do not feel quite so sure that I am keen on the asylum, after all.”

In fact, he had no idea what he should do until he had seen Alice again, and knew the state of affairs at Boyne’s.

Dr. Rogers, of course, was ignorant of this, and was as surprised as pleased at John’s reply. He had never expected that his offer of hospitality would be accepted, much less that his headstrong assistant would reconsider the question of going to Rudford.

“ By the way,” he said, “ a nasty thing happened over that panel patient that wanted visiting the night you were taken bad. You remember, the one we said we’d see in the morning ? ”

“ Yes, quite well, a throat.”

“ Well, I absolutely couldn’t go next morning. I had twenty private visits to do, and no end of insured that had to be seen. Besides, I didn’t think it was anything bad. However, they sent up again when I was out, and again in the evening, and I went to see him. The beggar had dip. (diphtheria) and

was jolly bad. I packed him off to the Isolation Hospital, and he died the same night."

"What an unholy business! Did the people kick up a row?"

"They were inclined to and talked about reporting it to the Insurance Committee, but I bluffed them with gas about making frivolous complaints that would get them into trouble. Lucky it was me; you'd never have done it!"

"Probably not."

"Oh, I had an awful time," continued Rogers plaintively, "the first two days before I got a locum, absolutely no luck at all. I had about fifty at the surgery the first night, mostly insured. I ordered most of 'em 'mist. aper. alk.' (an alkaline aperient mixture) and one beggar who had complained of a 'tummy' ache, the very man, mark you, who, with ordinary decent luck it ought to have benefitted, went home and got a perforated appendix and pegged out the next morning! How could I help it? I couldn't examine the whole bally lot that came into the surgery or I'd have been at it till 10 o'clock, could I?"

"No," said John bluntly, "but you ought not to have so many on your panel. I've always thought so."

"Rubbish, my son. Everybody gets what he can. Why should I throw away six and sixpences? None of the other men do."

"Naturally enough," agreed John, "but it ought to be prevented. I know some of the other poor blokes who have only a hundred or two on their

panels would be thankful enough for some more. I know one or two who would. Look at Jones and Meredith, just started, who went on the panel some time after the Act came into force, and you and the other old hands had bagged all the patients. The Act's ruination for any man putting up his plate now."

"It is rather the deuce," agreed Rogers, "for those youngsters naturally depend at starting upon a poorer class private practice which, since the Act, is simply *non est*. Yes, we old-established birds have got them, and we shall keep them as far as I can see, because patients are just like sheep; they follow the crowd."

"But it's lucky in some ways you were laid up," he went on, "I found three of the 'privates' grumbling in bed, and ready to call in someone else. You'd let them see that you didn't know what was the matter with them and had given them no medicine."

"I'd asked you to see them," said Fownes, "I gave them no medicine because we hadn't got the drugs that would have affected what they probably had wrong with them. Did you diagnose them?"

"Of course not, I had no time. But give people *some* medicine, for heaven's sake. My dear Fownes, a stock of drugs has very little to do with success in general practice. Give the patients *something* and be nice to them, and you'll get on. But I forgot you're chucking general practice. Still, you are nice to some of them, the wrong ones, that's why

they come up so much ; a lot of insured have been enquiring about you."

" I'm sure I'm not particularly loving to them. Why, I hardly have time to ask them what the matter is," said John.

" And that reminds me," continued Rogers, " your friend Boyne has also been enquiring for you again to-day. He left a card with the maid ; I was out, but had told her not to let anyone disturb you."

Fownes flushed.

" Again !" he said. " I didn't know he'd been at all."

" Didn't I tell you ? " said Rogers. " Oh, yes, he came over a fortnight ago."

" Kind of him. I suppose I was pretty bad then ? " said Fownes, with rather overdone indifference.

" Oh, he didn't come to ask how you were," said Rogers. " In fact, he seemed surprised you were ill. He said he wanted to see you—didn't say what about—and appeared more annoyed that he couldn't, than sorry for you."

He looked enquiringly at Fownes, but obtaining no reply, went on :

" He's a cold-blooded devil, though your friend, and a minister of the Church," and Rogers shrugged his shoulders.

" He is, rather," said Fownes drily. Then he lit his pipe, the relish for which was returning after his illness, and puffed in silence.

Seeing he was indisposed to further conversation, Dr. Rogers went downstairs, and amused himself by calculating his bad debts.

John was glad to be alone to digest this further information from the seat of war.

” What could Boyne want with him ? ”

Various hypotheses occurred to him. The parson, after being convinced by his wife that his suspicions were unfounded, might have come to apologise. Or he may have made up his mind to kick up a row, or threaten divorce proceedings. Perhaps Alice was ill—which God forbid!—but that was not probable; Boyne would hardly come to tell him that. But the man was quite capable of making her so by his brutal ways and sarcasm. If he had, he should pay for it!

John began to work himself into a rage. He cursed himself for being such a fool as to become ill, and for not settling with Boyne at the time. But that was folly.

Then he reproached himself for choosing such an inopportune moment for speaking to her, for not noticing the passage of time during their interview, and so on. He spent another miserable day in this frame of mind, but, nevertheless, he was rapidly recovering his strength.

He received no reply from Alice, so he wrote again, begging her to meet him the next evening, at half-past six o'clock, outside Charing Cross Post-Office. He knew she could go out unknown to her husband between tea and dinner on that day, because the vicar then held a confirmation class.

The following night John was at the place of appointment a quarter-of-an-hour before the time. He took up his position on the right of the entrance,

and anxiously scanned every approaching female figure. He was not very sanguine about her coming. He could not help noticing what a general rendezvous the place was. Here was a fashionably-dressed shop-girl, with rouge on her cheeks, and happiness in her eyes, meeting an anæmic clerk, bound, as John conjectured, for the pit of a theatre. They kissed, quite unashamed, when they met, and the youth handed her, half shyly, a bag of chocolates. John sighed; they were so transparently happy, like two children let out of school. There, was a husband in frock coat and top hat—both the worse for wear—meeting, after his day's work, a parcel-laden wife, and relieving her of most of her burden. They were apparently newly married, and their greeting made John's heart ache. Here, again, two men friends off to a music-hall.

As a background for all was the seemingly unceasing struggle of tired workers to obtain a footing on the east-bound motor 'buses that stopped at the corner.

The time crept on all the more slowly for John's impatience; a quarter to seven said the post-office clock, and no Alice. The others loitering there when he came, met their expected friends in turn, and went off about their business or pleasure. As seven o'clock approached, his heart sank. She would not come. Had he offended her too deeply; did she doubt his penitence? Perhaps, after all, she was ill, or away from home. The last thought comforted him a little.

He looked wistfully westward, hoping against

hope. Then he suddenly shrank back against the building with a muttered "Damn!" He had recognised the figure of James Boyne. The latter was approaching from the west with nervous strides, and sunken head, looking quite unlike his old complacent and leisurely self.

Fownes stepped forward to where he could be seen. Boyne might be coming instead of his wife, or he might possibly be there by chance. In any case he would accost him. Fownes was determined to get to the bottom of the matter now. His conduct towards Boyne should be dictated by the latter's demeanour.

The clergyman reached the post-office, and raising a haggard face, furtively scanned the loiterers and passers-by. Presently he saw Fownes, and an expression of bitter malice crossed his face. He approached the doctor.

"So you are here, after all, are you?" he said satirically. "Touching devotion!"

"Why the devil have *you* come?" retorted Fownes. "Do you steal your wife's private letters?"

Boyne's face worked.

"You dog!" he said slowly. "Where is my wife?"

Fownes stared blankly at the other's twitching face; there could be no question of its deadly earnestness and sincerity. His apprehension for Alice returned.

"Before God," he said solemnly, "I do not know. Tell me, man, what has happened!"

The vicar laughed sharply, a short unnatural laugh. Some passers-by turned to look at him. Fownes observed this, and walking to the edge of the pavement, hailed a taxi cab. Boyne followed, and got in without a word.

“Where to?” said the driver.

“Oh, er, Marble Arch,” replied Fownes impatiently. And away they went.

“I wonder if you are lying,” said Boyne deliberately, looking malevolently into the doctor’s darkening face.

With an effort the latter mastered his anger, knowing he would get nothing out of Boyne by giving it rein.

“I have told you,” he said, “that I do not know where your wife is. Why should I write to her at your house if I hadn’t thought she was there? If you’ll tell me when and how she went, I may be able to help you find her.”

Boyne laughed again.

“She went away the morning after you slunk out of my house like a whipped cur, you seducer of honest women!”

“Control your tongue,” said Fownes in a suppressed voice, “or I sha’n’t be able to keep my hands off you.”

The other measured the doctor’s five feet eleven of sinewy manhood with an eye of hate, and nodded grimly.

“D’you think I should help *you* find her, you fool—if she be living,” he said, with the unnatural smile Fownes hated more than his insults. “I have

failed to find any trace of her, and I have used means that discover all but the dead."

Boyne's words struck cold to John's heart.

"My God! she may have——" but he could not finish; the dreadful thought choked him.

Boyne eyed him mockingly, enjoying his anguish. They sat awhile in silence. Fownes' mind was working. He would find out from his mother if anything was known of Alice at her home in the village; he might get some clue there. Then, looking up to see where the taxi had taken them, for he had forgotten their destination, he caught Boyne's gaze bent upon him in malignant triumph.

"If any harm has come to Alice," said Fownes truculently, "I'll kill *you*."

"I had come to the same conclusion in reference to yourself," said Boyne through his teeth.

Fownes stopped the driver.

"Offices of *The Times*, *Telegraph*, *Mail*, and *Morning Post*," he ordered.

"Which first?" asked the man.

"Oh, which you like," was the impatient reply, "but go quick."

He leaned back with an involuntary groan.

"Your uncontrolled happiness is a pleasure to witness, even more so than I anticipated," remarked the clergyman malevolently.

"Oh, shut up, man!" snapped Fownes, who was busy writing on the back of an envelope with a pencil held by trembling fingers.

"I have already availed myself of the papers," continued Boyne.

"D'you think she'd reply to *your* advertisement?" sneered the doctor in his turn.

"I think so, because I used her father's name, and am in communication with him—if she be alive," said Boyne, almost complacently.

Fownes winced.

"You devil!" he said. But he did not lose hope in his project. At length they reached the different newspaper offices, and he inserted in the personal column of each the following pathetic message:

"Alice. Heart-broken with anxiety. Wire or write if all well. Shall never be upset again.—
Jack."

Boyne insisted on following him into the offices, his rage returning more and more at his inability to prevent the insertions. His malice in rousing Fownes' anxiety had only recoiled upon his own head by inciting the doctor to action.

"Any more, my love-sick puppy?" he contrived to sneer, as they left the *Morning Post* Office. (The taxi driver knew his business, and had succeeded in covering as much ground as possible in taking them to the four newspaper offices.)

"No," replied Fownes, somewhat cheered by action, "I think they will do, and be damned to you!"

The clergyman remained on the pavement when Fownes re-entered the cab.

"May your anxiety drive you mad," he cursed, with concentrated fury, "and to the hell that awaits you!"

He turned on his heel, and hailing another taxi cab, drove westward.

"He's not far off mad himself," muttered Fownes. Then, weary and dejected after his excitement, he gave Dr. Rogers' address to the chauffeur and was driven home.

When they reached their destination John paid the driver handsomely, and went into the surgery. He walked straight over to the poison cupboard, selected some tabloids of morphia, and took them up to his bedroom. He undressed rapidly, and dissolving a tabloid in water from his bottle, injected the solution into his arm.

CHAPTER V

JOHN awoke at ten o'clock the next morning, with a racking headache, and a black depression of spirits, partly the result of the morphia. Everything seemed hopeless, and he wished he were dead. He felt a bitter remorse for his whole conduct with regard to Alice, and looked upon her disappearance as the work of an avenging fate. But he rebelled savagely against it. As he had resolved the previous night, he wrote to his mother. He knew that any incident became public gossip in the village in a few hours, and that she would perforce know it. He placed no reliance on Boyne's statements, except that Alice had left home. It would hardly be possible for the vicar to keep his wife a prisoner in his own house. Mrs. Fownes knew all the history of his unhappy love affair, except its latest development, and John was ashamed to tell her that. She, for her part, cherished a cordial dislike to Alice for marrying Mr. Boyne.

John next read his own advertisement in the day's *Telegraph*. Then, because he was too miserable and restless to remain at home in inactivity, he went out and bought the other newspapers in which he had inserted his advertisement. He read them despondently. What was the good? She had not replied to Boyne's appeal in her father's name. She had left without even a farewell to

himself. Still weak from his recent illness, he returned home feverishly agitated and wretched. He threw his papers on the table—and then caught his breath in a sudden gasp. There lay the familiar dull orange envelope, the harbinger of so many griefs and joys. Quite unlike his decided self, John could not, for some seconds, bring himself to open it. Suppose it were not from Alice, nor even about her? He felt he could not bear that. But it might bring bad tidings of her; perhaps she was ill and wanted him. He tore it open with shaking fingers, glanced at the signature, and burst out crying like a child.

When he had regained his composure a little, he read the telegram time after time. It ran as follows :

“ Am quite well and happy, so far as possible. This is handed in far from where I am. Be patient.—Alice.”

Waves of joy surged over his heart. She was safe, and happy so far as she could be—without him, the darling! He strode exultantly round the room, kicking Dr. Rogers' chairs out of the way as he went. Then he crumpled his newspapers into balls, and punted them through the open window on to the heads of startled passers-by, who looked up in amazement to see a stream of papers issuing from the room. He kissed his fingers to them (it was a third-storey window). Having relieved his feelings he lit a cigar in honour of the occasion, and became more rational.

He read the telegram for the eighth time, and

began to ponder its contents other than the central fact of Alice's well-being. She was hiding from him, but clearly only for a time. Her "be patient" plainly inferred that. He saw that the wire had been sent from the G.P.O. He could see no reason why she should conceal her movements from him, unless she feared he would renew his importunities. But he had promised. Then he remembered she had never received his two letters. The possibility that she distrusted her own resolution did not enter his mind. She might, he thought, have sent him a line before she went away, but perhaps she had, and her husband had intercepted it. In any case he was not inclined to blame his love now, but he was disposed to rejoice in her safety, and to "be patient"—at any rate for a time.

He would correspond with her through the "Agony Column," and persuade her to relent and see him. He wished he knew which paper she saw daily. It would cost a great deal to communicate through entries in all the papers. Then it occurred to him that it was, unfortunately, necessary to earn money, as well as spend it! There was that asylum. He felt reluctant to leave London just now, but here was this post probably to be had for the asking. Then he had no idea where Alice was, in fact, the telegram distinctly inferred that she was not in town. He might as well go to Northshire as anywhere else. His manner of going would be very different from what he had anticipated! At any rate, if Alice would not be with him, neither would she be with Boyne. There was satisfaction in that,

Dr. Rogers was one of those discreet persons who never betray the least curiosity about other folks' business, but who, nevertheless, take a keen interest in knowing it, and a delight in ferretting it out. He enjoyed the feeling of superiority such knowledge gave him, but he never gossipped. Neither did he seek his friends' confidence, but it was sometimes wise to bestow it upon him, for he was a good friend, and gave sound advice, moreover, he usually found out what he wished. He had always been sceptical of Fownes' ostensible friendship for the Rev. J. Boyne, to whom he himself strongly objected—and treated with marked politeness. He had duly noted the frequency with which Fownes, in his delirium, reiterated the name "Alice," and the former's depression during his convalescence, also his vacillation about the asylum. He had observed the clergyman's suppressed agitation on the two occasions he tried to see Fownes. And numerous minor indications had not escaped his trained eye. So he had come to the conclusion that there was "something" between his assistant and Mrs. Boyne, and further, that this something had come to the husband's knowledge.

Dr. Rogers felt no surprise, therefore, when the previous night Fownes missed his dinner, and when he did come in, went straight to bed. He made no comments. He was out on his round of visits before John came down this morning, but when they met at luncheon he was astonished at the change in his demeanour. John's eyes sparkled,

and he wore an air of contentment such as Rogers had not seen for some weeks.

“ Good-morning,” said Rogers, as Fownes came in to the meal, “ you’re looking very fit to-day—well enough to work ? ”

“ I am,” was the prompt reply, “ and quite ready for it. I’d like you to see if that job’s still going, the asylum, you know, if you don’t mind.”

“ Oh, would you ? ” growled Rogers, “ I thought you had sense enough to give up that idea. Do you want to start at once ? ”

“ Why, yes,” said John, “ but we can’t hear for two days. I am entirely at your service until then.”

“ You know I was not thinking of that,” said Rogers, with twinkling eyes. Fownes smiled.

“ Look here,” said he, “ you take a couple of days off. Go away somewhere. I can easily manage with the help of the other blighter for that time.”

“ Unfortunately, I am dependent upon my practice for my livelihood, otherwise I should be charmed,” said Rogers ; “ but do not be cast down, I need not slight your generous offer. There’s plenty of work just now for all of us ! ” and he grinned rather sheepishly.

“ Oh, that’s it, then,” said John, “ things brisk, eh ? Right-o, I’ll help. As a matter of fact,” he added, “ I shouldn’t be surprised if I can give you my finished services for considerably longer. Very likely Smith has got a man now ! Ah, I forgot, I am only a guest now ; of course, you won’t want me to work.”

Rogers' face fell ; he had hoped to get a few days' work from John for nothing. John smiled maliciously at him for a moment.

" But, of course, also," he said, " I'll still be pleased to do all I can until we hear from Northshire."

" I don't think Smith will have a man yet," replied Rogers, with an air of relief. " He won't touch middle-aged failures in other branches of the profession, nor boys straight from hospital, and those are the only two sorts, practically, who are fools enough to apply for such billets."

" How long does he expect one to stay there ? How long did the last man ? " asked Fownes.

" He doesn't like birds of passage ; the last A.M.O. was there about two years, I think."

" Did he get a better job when he left ? "

" I think so, but that's a matter of opinion," was the non-committal reply.

" What was that ? " continued John, naturally interested in his own chance of promotion.

" Died," said Rogers laconically.

" Encouraging chap you are ! " said John, after a pause.

" Well, you know what my advice to you was. Time has only strengthened my opinion."

" You seem deuced anxious to prevent me going there. Are you afraid I shall hear something from Smith about that dissipated past of yours ? " and John smiled slyly.

" It's awful to contemplate," said the other tragically, " the past ! The bills I've never been

paid ! It's dreadful to think how I've slaved all my life to make a meagre pittance—— ”

“ Three thousand a year ! ” remarked John.

“ —which is sadly eaten into by expensive and ailing assistants, and bad debts,” continued Rogers. “ I swotted like the devil at—— ”

“ Footer ! ” grinned John. (Rogers had been a famous three-quarter at his hospital.)

“ —bridge ! ” went on the other reprovingly. “ Nearly every night in the accident dresser's room we played until two a.m. to the accompaniment of pipes and small ‘ Basses. ’ Some of us never went home o' nights. I remember once eight of us slept on the floor of that room—it was about twelve feet by eight, including the space covered by the dresser's bed—and the poor beggar, half asleep, had to pick his way over us every time he was called up. I woke once when he stepped on my chest, and my amateur protest was absolutely bleached by the choice expressions that dresser used to tell me his opinion of me. It was the finest thing I ever heard ! That same dresser, by-the-way, was dedicated to the calling of medical missionary, but I believe he abandoned medicine later and went into the Church. Sensible man.”

“ Why ? ” asked John.

“ His uncle had the gift of a good living. But it was a pity,” said Rogers regretfully ; “ he was a great boxer, and the best hand at ‘ no trumps ’ I ever saw. He won eighteen pounds—— ”

The entrance of his boy in buttons cut short the doctor's reminiscences. He took a note from the

boy, who promptly vanished, and read it peevishly.

“That charming woman, Applewick-Jones,” he remarked, “has another attack of palpitation, and sends an urgent message. Treats me like a shoe-black, and instructs her butler to count my visits to see if his total tallies with my own. Always wants a detailed bill. Sort of lady I’d like to go away and leave to you, Fownes! You’d lose her as a patient after your first visit, and me a hundred a year. I’m off to kow-tow to her. See the lunch is kept hot for my assistant,” he added; “he’ll be in at two.”

Dr. Rogers often abused his patients to Fownes, but always did his utmost for them—especially if they paid well. The medical man who refrains from curing ailments when he can, in order that they may drag on, and necessitate more visits, is a myth, in which I, gentle reader, believe no more than you.

John remained indoors. Feeling fatigued after the excitement of the morning, he went into his own room, and having secured a hypnotic in the form of a well-known text-book of medicine, deposited himself in two chairs—one for his legs—and was soon sleeping peacefully.

· We will take this opportunity, mademoiselle, of rectifying an omission that we fear may have annoyed you. Now that such may be done without offence, for our hero sleeps, we will examine his outward person. We note that he is tall, and straight-limbed, thin, but wiry. It is to be regretted

that his dark hair does not curl, that his clean-shaven upper lip is not excessively short, nor his chin correspondingly lengthy. But to compensate for these deficiencies, his forehead is sufficiently capacious—an unusual feature in a hero—his skin clear, but rather pale, his mouth firm, his nose long and thin. Indeed, his whole countenance exhibits these two latter characteristics. His eyes at present we cannot see, but you may take it from us that they are grey and frank, with a trick of looking straight at you, and expressing his mood and his opinion of you. Needless to say, mademoiselle, you will like his eyes.

If his appearance has the misfortune to displease you, attribute it to the lameness of our description, and endow him with any other features for which you cherish an admiration.

Now, we return to our narrative with an easy conscience.

After tea John duly expended some more money upon "Agony Columns," expressing his joy in Alice's safety, and repeating his good resolutions. And Dr. Rogers wrote (at last) to Dr. Smith of the Rudford Asylum.

Two mornings later, John was interrupted while dressing, by the entrance of Dr. Rogers with a razor in one hand, and a soap-spotted telegraph form in the other.

"Smith wants you to go down and see him to-day," said he, "and says the 10.15 from Euston is the best train. Shall I wire 'Yes'? The boy's waiting."

“ I’ll do it,” replied John. “ Is there a telegraph form downstairs ? ”

Rogers handed him the soapy one he held.

“ Thanks,” said John, “ I thought that was shaving paper ! ”

“ Impudent puppy,” remarked Rogers, continuing his shaving before John’s mirror. “ Got any shaving paper ? ”

He used some John pointed out, and as the latter wrote out his reply, calmly appropriated half of the contents of the case.

“ I’ll take that down,” he added, as John finished writing. “ You’ll never catch the train if you don’t get on with your dressing. I’ll come back and help you afterwards ! ”

This in reference to the care John habitually bestowed upon that process. He was rather a dandy in his dress, and his toilet to-day was naturally extra fastidious.

Nevertheless, he eventually caught his train, and journeyed down to Northshire in a comfortable state of body and mind.

CHAPTER VI

AFTER a wearisome journey of some four hours, and several changes, John at length reached his destination. This was a sleepy town of about six thousand inhabitants, situated in a rich, but flat country, devoted chiefly to pasturage and shooting coverts, and intersected by several streams.


The air was invigorating, and seemed to John remarkably clear after the murky atmosphere of London.

As he stepped on to the station platform, a coachman approached him, and enquired if he were for the asylum. John assented, and asked in his turn how far it was.

"Near five miles," replied the man, leading the way out of the station. "I've the dog-cart outside."

John boarded the somewhat rickety trap, and they set off at a leisurely trot. Traversing squalid streets with somnolent shops, and an ancient market place, John noticed several fine churches, in addition to an imposing pile resembling a cathedral, which seemed to spurn the dilapidated cottages at its feet. One or two solitary wayfarers glanced up as the trap approached them, and eyed John suspiciously.

Finally they emerged into a country road, winding steadily upward, and bordered by stunted willows. John had ample leisure to observe the countryside.

It was singularly uninteresting, hardly a farm or habitation of any sort was visible, and no signs of cultivation interrupted the monotonous verdancy of nature. Even some small hills were green, many of them clothed by dark pines. On the more barren of them a few sheep grazed, appearing as dirty white spots upon their distant sides. 

Once out of the town, the dog-cart hardly encountered a soul on the road. The coachman seemed a taciturn individual, not a word had escaped his lips since they left the station-yard.

All this, in spite of the sunshine, and the "nip" in the early autumn air, produced a depressing effect upon John. He turned to the Jehu.

"Fertile country," said he, "but doesn't seem to be taken much advantage of."

"Ay," said the man laconically.

"Must be healthy," continued John. "You don't look as if you ailed much."

"Nay, I'm sound," was the reply. Scriptural sort of beggar, thought John.

"I suppose you know my business here?" he queried.

"Reckon you'll be a doctor come about the job," said the man.

"Quite right," responded John. "How long have you been without one?"

The coachman looked at him with mistrust, and woke up his cob with the whip, before replying.

"About a month," he growled, and shut his mouth with a snap.

"Surly brute," thought John, "I'd soon teach

him manners if he were my servant." But he held his peace, and they finished the journey in silence.

Presently they turned into a wide carriage drive, bordered by well-kept lawns, and leading straight to the Rudford County Lunatic Asylum. The building resembled nothing so much as a large country mansion, the grounds a private park. Spacious lawns, studded with cedars, oaks and various species of fir, met John's astonished gaze on all sides. No high walls, railings, gates or barred windows were anywhere visible. When they reached the asylum buildings, John was struck by the absolute silence that prevailed. Where were the shouts and maniacal laughter he had expected to assail his ears? He felt that he would almost prefer to hear them, the absence of life, and the stillness, were oppressive.

The trap pulled up at a fine porch, the gothic beauties of which were partly concealed by climbing plants. The coachman jumped down, and opening the massive door, ushered John into the hall. He rang an electric bell, and then went out and shut the door. John found himself in a large square apartment lit by ground-glass windows, and panelled in modern oak. Two heavy doors, in addition to the entrance from the grounds, were placed symmetrically at its further end.

In reply to the bell, the hall-porter emerged from one of these, and told John that the medical superintendent would be disengaged in a few moments.

Presently an electric bell buzzed, and that functionary re-appeared, and conducted John into a large oblong room.

This was the medical superintendent's office. John entered with some curiosity to see Dr. Rogers' friend. Dr. Smith was pacing the room, but stopped as John came in. The superintendent was flushed and angry, but greeting the other cordially enough, asked him to sit down.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, Dr. Fownes," he said, "but I was reprimanding an idle and useless nurse, who ought to be in a nursery. She actually permitted a patient to secrete some bread and butter, and eat it in bed!"

The magnitude of this crime was lost upon John, but he concluded that there was more in it than met the ear.

Dr. Smith seemed to recover his equanimity after this remark, and sitting down, began to question John about his past experience. His interrogation was perfunctory, but nevertheless, John perceived that if Dr. Smith were indifferent about his ability and knowledge, he was endeavouring to form a pretty accurate estimate of his character. But throughout, except for occasional furtive glances at John's face, he examined the desk in front of him. John, on the contrary, as he was wont, looked steadily at Dr. Smith the whole time.

He saw a tall, but neatly-made man of about forty, with fair hair, a sallow, clean-shaven, deeply-lined face, and a thin-lipped mouth. An otherwise commonplace appearance was redeemed by two

piercing brown eyes. His thin, nervous hands were constantly trifling with a pen, paper weight, or what not.

“Now,” said he, after receiving an outline of John’s career, “it is only fair that I should tell you something about the asylum and ourselves. We have about 500 patients and 50 attendants, male and female. The patients under the system I adopt are fairly easily managed, but the staff is a perpetual curse. Asylum nurses and attendants are the most unreliable class I know! They are idle, inefficient, untruthful——” and here Dr. Smith went off into vindictive diatribe against asylum employees.

John was bored; it seemed a childish outburst.

At length Dr. Smith broke off, and asked suddenly:

“Are you a good disciplinarian?”

“I really don’t know,” replied John, “I have had no experience in governing men.”

“I aim at a high standard in management,” observed the other, “and act upon the principle that because a man is mad it is no reason why he should misconduct himself. He may think what he likes, but he must behave himself.”

John opened his eyes.

“But surely,” said he, “you cannot make excited cases adhere to an inoffensive line of conduct?”

“Can’t I?” replied Dr. Smith grimly. “You will see if you come here, and what is more, must second me in my efforts. Why, mine is one of the

quietest asylums in the kingdom. We hardly ever have trouble, such as inquests, fractures, accidents, or violence, no, nor escapes or suicides."

He evidently expected John to be impressed, so the latter said :

" Really ? "

" Now we will look over the place," said Dr. Smith, rising, and leading the way through the hall to a second larger corridor into which opened the doors to the wards. They passed through one marked " male division," which gave ingress to the first male ward. On the threshold they were met by an individual in gorgeous uniform. He saluted them elaborately. This was the chief male attendant, a man whom many years of asylum service had converted into an automaton, and a few years of Dr. Smith's supremacy, into a liar.

The ward they entered, a type of the others, was a large clean apartment, with polished wood flooring, and painted walls. Its furniture consisted of pitch-pine tables, and varnished white wood chairs. A few coloured prints culled from Christmas numbers of periodicals decorated the walls. In this ward were forty patients, for the most part idling. A few read out-of-date newspapers, piles of which reposed upon some of the tables. They were perfectly quiet, only an air of apathy distinguishing them from sane men, as they appeared just then. The majority were pale and thin, and sat about with sunken heads. A few John noticed were of a peculiar sallow tint, and looked sleepy. The three attendants sprang smartly to attention. They

saluted as the two doctors, with the head attendant, traversed the ward. Dr. Smith wore an air of satisfaction as he drew John's attention to the quietude, the cleanliness, the neatness and uniformity of the patients' dress, facts which somehow repelled the younger man, and stirred up pity in his heart for the pale, indifferent throng around him.

In the next, and succeeding three wards, the same conditions prevailed. Then they entered the infirmary ward.

Here some thirty men were in bed.

"What is wrong with most of these, bodily or mental illness?" queried John.

"The majority are in bed for physical ailments," replied Dr. Smith. "Those bedded for excitement, etc., are kept in the refractory ward."

That, into which they now emerged was the last of the male wards. It proved to have its eighteen single rooms, which opened into one side of the ward, all occupied. At the open doors of three of these, attendants stood stiffly to attention. Two more paraded up and down the ward, and two were posted at intervals in it. If the patients in the other parts of the asylum appeared apathetic, here they looked wretched. That peculiar sallow complexion was the rule here. These refractory patients were hardly less neat and quiet than those in other wards. The two doctors looked into the rooms guarded by the special attendants, and were greeted by a few words of abuse from drunken-looking individuals, clad only in coarse "indestructible" shirts, open at

the neck. John noticed that these patients had three rugs of some rough fabric apiece, in lieu of bed and bedding.

"I suppose these are destructive cases?" he observed.

"One of them," replied Dr. Smith, "the other two have a strong shirt and rugs for quarrelling."

The superintendent next led John into an airing-court, enclosed on two sides by the walls of the building, on the third by an independant wall, and shut off from the front grounds, on the fourth by a deep ditch and low privet hedge. This area, for the patients to promenade, was a great saving in attendants, as compared with those necessary to supervise parties walking in the roads. Except for a row seated upon chairs, in front of whom patrolled an attendant, the patients were turned out into the court to do more or less as they liked, as far as the iron discipline of the place allowed. The ground was ashphalted, save where a few beds strove to nourish some neglected shrubs. The patients wandered aimlessly about, for the most part silently; a few conversed in subdued tones. Throughout the asylum none spoke loudly, shouted, or laughed. The keynote of the place was silence.

John was much impressed by his round of inspection. This must be a very well-conducted asylum, thought he, and Smith a clever manager. Yet, he did not like it. It depressed him. No one seemed happy, nobody, but one imbecile, smiled. He rallied himself upon his susceptibility. How could he expect an asylum to be a cheerful place? The

insane, poor devils, were naturally miserable. But his feeling remained unchanged.

“ Well,” said Dr. Smith, when they returned to his office, “ what do you think of it ? ”

“ I hardly know what to think,” returned John. “ I had no idea asylums were such quiet, orderly places.”

“ They are not all so orderly by any means,” said Dr. Smith, with complacence. “ I flatter myself that mine is a model one, both in that respect, and from the point of view of expense. My two aims are freedom from ‘ trouble,’ and a low maintenance rate. Nothing, besides, pleases asylum committees so much. Still, in justice to my fellow superintendents, I must say that there are a fair number who have the same objects in view.”

John was not sufficiently experienced to know what to place against these two desiderata, and we will not weary the reader by enumerating the criminal defects of this, the now common system of asylum management. They will emerge as our narrative progresses. But we hasten to reassure our tender-hearted reader, there is no overt physical ill-usage ; violence is taboo. Shackles, strait-jackets, and other ingenious devices are unknown, nor are patients locked up in separate cells, at any rate in the day time.

“ Now, Dr. Fownes,” continued Smith, “ do you think you will care to come here as A.M.O. ? ”

“ Yes, I think so,” replied John. “ Of course, you understand that I know no more of lunacy than one learns as a student ? ”

“ Oh, that doesn't matter,” said the other carelessly, “ you will soon pick up all you need know. Now, come and have some tea at my house.”

They crossed the grounds to an ugly stone structure, surrounded by a tall privet hedge. But within everything was luxurious, elegant, and evinced excellent taste. A dainty tea-table awaited them, over which presided a strikingly beautiful woman. She was tall, rather full figured, and possessed the transparent pink complexion that is only found with auburn hair. She appeared to be about thirty-five. Nevertheless, it was not her good looks that chiefly attracted John's attention, but her sad expression. An air of sweet melancholy seemed to encompass her.

Dr. Smith introduced her to John simply as Mrs. Dennis. The superintendent in her society threw off the cares of the asylum, and chatted in an animated fashion that rather surprised John. She said very little, but listened sympathetically, and indeed seemed to attend to John's remarks almost with eagerness. No doubt it was this flattering interest that contributed to the attraction he felt toward her.

After tea Dr. Smith conducted John round the administrative block of the asylum. This was only of technical interest, so we will spare the reader a description of it. Of his own future quarters John obtained only a glimpse, as Smith hurried him away, saying :

“ Don't look too much at these now. They are dirty and neglected, but will be quite different when

you come. It is some weeks since they were vacated, but they have not been thoroughly overhauled yet."

He made no mention of their former occupant, and John did not care to question him.

They returned to Dr. Smith's house, and chatted with Mrs. Dennis until it was time for John to catch his train back to town. Smith came out to the dog-cart with him. They shook hands, and John was about to get up, when the other said, with assumed indifference :

" I suppose you won't mind being an abstainer here ; perhaps you are already ? "

" No, I am not," said John, in astonishment.

" But you will not object ? " persisted Smith, eyeing the ground.

" Surely rather an unusual request, sir ? " replied John, rather sharply.

" Perhaps it is," admitted Smith. " I regret that I did not mention it to you before. But I am afraid it is essential. I really hope you can see your way to fall in with this," he added, as John made no reply. " The committee insists upon it. I am sure we should pull well together." His tone was apologetic, and overcame John's first impulse to tell him " to go to the deuce." Then he reflected that, after all, he did not care a button for alcoholic drinks, so he said :

" Very well, I am prepared to accept that condition."

" I am very much obliged to you," was the earnest reply. Then, with some hesitation : " You will not

mind signing the usual Total Abstinence Pledge ? ”

John smiled satirically.

“ Not at all,” he said, “ but how do you know I shall not break it ? ”

“ I have no doubts about that,” replied the other, with an intonation that sounded almost envious.

“ Now when can you come ? ” he added.

“ In three or four days.”

“ Good. To-day is the 15th. Shall we say the 19th ? ”

“ Yes, that will do very well. Good-bye,” and John was driven off to the station.

The day's experience served to occupy his thoughts during the return journey. He greatly admired Mrs. Dennis, felt indifferent to Dr. Smith, but experienced a good deal of curiosity about them both.

On the whole he concluded that he had acted wisely in taking the post for a while, until he discovered, or Alice revealed, her whereabouts.

CHAPTER VII

“ WELL, young man,” said Dr. Rogers, the next day at lunch, “ what are your plans ? ”

“ I go there on the 19th,” returned John. “ If you can manage to spare me then.”

“ I will try ; but you are an ass ! ”

“ Of course, but we decided that before.”

Dr. Rogers went on with his lunch.

“ You don't seem exactly dying to hear my impressions of the place,” remarked John.

“ Well, get on with it ; I suppose I must undergo it,” said Rogers, with a sigh of resignation.

“ You shall do more, that is, take part in it. Now first of all, who is the lady known as Mrs. Dennis ? ”

“ Smith's housekeeper.”

John smiled.

“ Quite,” he said, “ what else ? ”

“ Look here, my son, be content with that. Pry not into other folks' affairs. You don't know her, I suppose ? ”

“ No,” said John, “ how should I ? ”

“ Well, then, let her alone. I never bother about the business of others.”

John whistled, as who should say, “ What a fib ! ”

“ Why does Smith insist on my being a teetotalter ? Is he one of those anti-everything fools ? ”

“ Oh dear, no. But I am not surprised he does.”

“ Why? Do I look a drinker, I should like to know?”

“ Anyhow, that’s not the reason, at least, I don’t suppose so,” teased Rogers. “ The fact is,” he went on, as John did not deign a reply, “ the last A.M.O. was a drunkard, and committed suicide.”

“ Good Lord!” ejaculated John, “ why didn’t you tell me that before?”

“ Heaven knows I have done my best to choke you off the place. But you were bent on it. What’s the use of talking?”

“ You are quite right,” said John. “ After all, it makes no difference. Because one man is a fool, there’s no reason why another shouldn’t take his job.” Then he added, more lightly, “ I’d take it as a favour if you’d tell me how to sign the Pledge, for Smith insists on that, too. Damn rot, I call it.”

“ It is a serious operation,” replied Rogers with mock gravity. “ The patient is usually prepared by a diet of pamphlets, tracts, etc. It is well to call in a specialist, such as a band of hope worker, who has not yet been convicted of felony—if such is extant—or a parson. He will bring his own instruments and anæsthetic, namely, a pledge-book and a supply of cant. The operation is not difficult, but frequently unsuccessful!”

“ I’m no forrarder now,” smiled John; “ I don’t know of any specialists, do you?”

“ There is your friend Boyne,” replied the other. “ He’d probably do it with gusto.”

John paled slightly.

“ Er, yes, Boyne, but I believe he is out of town just now.”

He hated himself for the lies he continually had to tell since the denouement of his intrigue with Alice.

Rogers noticed his embarrassment.

“ Well, then,” he went on, “ I should write to some religious publishing house for a pledge-book, then you can sign half-a-dozen times for safety ”—grinning derisively.

“ Good idea,” said John, “ I will to-night. The devil take Smith ! ”

John devoted the next two days to preparing for his change of home, but found time to do a few visits for Dr. Rogers. Returning from one of these on the evening of the second day, he was met by Rogers in the hall.

“ There’s a lady waiting for you in your room,” said the latter, with a sly smile.

“ A lady ! ” exclaimed John. “ Who is she, what’s she like ? ”

“ You’d better go up and see.”

John dashed upstairs, his heart throbbing, and his head whirling with the thought of Alice. He ran into his room, but stopped suddenly with a bitter pang of disappointment at the sight of Mrs. Dennis seated composedly in his arm-chair. Surprise and vexation replaced his disappointment. He bowed stiffly. The lady noticed his change of countenance.

She rose, and returning his bow, said in her sweet voice :

“ Please forgive this intrusion, Dr. Fownes. I fear you expected someone else.”

“ Hardly expected, madam,” he returned bluntly. “ But to what do I owe this pleasure ? ” Then he recovered himself somewhat, and asked her to sit down.

“ Dr. Fownes,” she began timidly, “ I have come as a petitioner, and in a sense as a monitor.”

John unconsciously raised his eyebrows.

She went on with obvious difficulty.

“ I quite realise I have no right—no right at all to advise you—— ” She looked appealingly at John, who, for his part, stared at her in open amazement.

Then he said encouragingly, “ Not at all.”

“ But,” pursued Mrs. Dennis, “ I liked you when you came down to Rudford—I can say that,” with a sad smile ; “ I am some fifteen years older than you, and I wanted to have a quiet talk with you.”

“ Well, I’m damned ! ” said John to himself, but aloud :

“ Delighted, I’m sure.”

Her smile lost its tinge of melancholy at this mechanical observation.

“ Are you particularly interested in lunacy, Doctor Fownes ? ” she queried.

“ I know nothing whatever about it,” replied John briskly.

He began to enjoy this interview.

“ Isn’t general practice much nicer ? ” she continued, rather vaguely.

“ I am no good at it,” was the dry reply.

“Asylum work is very monotonous, and depressing,” persisted she; “I am sure other posts are more pleasurable.”

“Medicine,” observed John oracularly, “is never a picnic.”

“But surely hospital posts are—er—most interesting?”

“My dear lady,” said John, “for some reason or another—I cannot believe out of charity towards me—you do not wish me to come to your asylum. Why, I haven’t the ghost of a notion. As you have come all this way to prevent me, your reason must be a powerful one——”

He paused enquiringly.

“It is true,” she said in a low voice, “but I cannot tell you the reason.”

“Then,” said John decidedly, “you must forgive me, but I cannot consent to forego this appointment.”

“The last A.M.O.,” she ventured. “The life tried him so that——”

“I know,” interrupted John, “he must have been a fool. That has nothing to do with me.”

Mrs. Dennis looked much distressed, and her lower lip began to tremble.

“If I beg you, for my sake——?” she murmured, blushing faintly.

John felt a brute, but all this only strengthened his determination to go to the asylum and get at the bottom of the matter. There was a mystery somewhere.

First Rogers tried to dissuade him, and now this beautiful woman took a hand at it. Were they

acting in collusion? What motive could she have? The only thing he could think of was that she feared in some way for Dr. Smith, whom, he was sure in his own mind, she loved. For his own experience had sharpened his vision in such matters. But of what was she apprehensive?

Her emotion, instead of softening him, renewed his annoyance.

"I am extremely sorry," he said, "but when all is said and done, I really cannot see what right you have to place me in the unpleasant position of having to refuse your request."

"Very well," said Mrs. Dennis, with a sigh, "I will say no more. I am grateful to you for your patience, Doctor Fownes."

She rose.

"Won't you give us the pleasure of your society at dinner? I am sure Dr. Rogers would be most pleased," said John awkwardly.

"Thank you, no," she replied, "I am catching the night train back."

"Allow me to get you a cab," said he, feeling still that he had treated her ill.

They went down together, John hailed a taxi cab, and insisted upon escorting her to the station. She would not be drawn into conversation during the ride, but John continually found himself watching her perfect profile silhouetted against the light of the street.

"Au revoir, doctor," she said, as she got into the train; "I will ask you one other thing, which you can do. Please do not mention my visit to anyone."

"Of course not," said John earnestly, "I—er—

hope you are not so very much annoyed with me ? ”

She smiled gently, and said :

“ No, I could hardly expect you to act otherwise. It was a forlorn hope, after all.”

And John left here, wondering how on earth he had been able to deny her her wish.

He expected Dr. Rogers to chaff him about his visitor when he reached home. But Rogers looked rather grave, and simply said :

“ Wouldn't she stay to dinner ? ”

“ No,” replied John.

There was a pause. Neither wished to pursue the subject, John because of his promise, Rogers for reasons of his own. Nevertheless, John was curious to know how much the latter knew.

Presently Rogers asked, conversationally :

“ Is your packing nearly done ? ”

“ Yes, except for things that must stay out until the last moment.”

“ What time of day are you starting on the 19th ? ”

“ I shall catch a morning train, the same I caught before.”

Thus Dr. Rogers learnt that John was still bent upon going to Rudford.

“ I suppose,” said Rogers tentatively, “ you couldn't postpone starting for a week, and help me in the practice ? ”

“ You do not wish, or need me,” replied John deliberately, and with meaning.

The other laughed uneasily.

“ Well, well,” said he, “ let's drop it, and have dinner.”

CHAPTER VIII

BEFORE leaving for Northshire John communicated once more with Alice Boyne by means of the newspapers, and this time she replied through the same medium, viz., the *Mail*. She did not reveal her address, but said that all was well with her. John went down to his new post free from anxiety, and full of interest in his new associates. On this occasion the coachman's demeanour was very different, indeed, he appeared over-anxious to please the new A.M.O.

When John alighted at the asylum entrance, the man also descended from his seat, and stood shifting from one foot to the other, and smiling sheepishly. John, who imagined he wanted a "tip," gave him half-a-crown, and turned to go in. But the coachman stopped him.

"Asking your pardon, sir," he said, "but if it isn't too much trouble, could you come and see my girl that's sick?"

"Is she very bad? Do you want me to come at once?"

"Oh, no, sir. When you're ready, sir."

"Do the doctors attend the families of the staff?"

A bitter smile momentarily crossed the man's face, but he replied in the affirmative, in the same humble voice.

“ Very well,” said John. “ Where do you live ? Will it do in an hour ? ”

The coachman pointed to a cottage on the asylum estate, and said :

“ Yes, sir. Thank you kindly, sir.”

The hall-porter met John in the hall, and conducted him straight into the superintendent’s office.

Dr. Smith greeted John cordially, made him sit down, and gave him a cigarette. He enquired about the journey, Dr. Rogers and his practice, compared it with his own, expressing his preference for treating lunatics, were it not for the trouble his staff gave him ; and finally said, casually :

“ By the way, what was Coles (the coachman) hanging about for outside ? ”

John told him, and also that he had agreed to see the daughter in an hour.

“ He has been imposing upon your ignorance of our customs,” said Smith curtly. “ His family is not entitled to treatment from us.”

“ Oh, I don’t mind seeing the girl,” said John. “ It isn’t as if he lived a distance away.”

“ But I mind,” returned Smith. “ The dog is encroaching. It would create a precedent, and I cannot have that. He must get a doctor from the town.”

“ Shall I tell him, then ? I promised to go.”

“ Don’t you bother,” replied the other. “ I’ll see to it. Now, I expect you’ll find tea ready in your room. Squires, the porter, will show you the way if you’ve forgotten, and I hope you’ll dine with

us to-night—at 8. It will give you time to get some of your unpacking done.”

John thanked him, and found his way up to his own quarters.

These consisted of two large square rooms in the front of the administrative block, with household offices behind. The sitting-room afforded a fine view over the front of the asylum estate, its window directly facing the main entrance drive, across which ran a lane dotted with cottages apportioned to certain of the staff.

He observed this before turning to his tea, which was ready on the table. This meal consisted of cold sodden toast, a broken stale cake, and weak tea. He was vexed, but not wishing to complain, for it had been prepared at an unusually early hour expressly for his convenience, he ate what he needed, and began to inspect his rooms.

The furniture, to put it briefly, resembled that of a cheap lodging-house, but without the numerous atrocious ornaments peculiar to such places. The shabby saddlebag upholstery was disfigured by many dark blotches, the writing-table stained by brown rings. Everywhere dust reigned undisturbed.

The bedroom was also furnished with shoddy.

John next examined the various receptacles. In the bookcase he found eighteen empty whisky-bottles, a cheque-book, three packs of cards, and a half-empty bottle of Chartreuse. In the drawers of the writing-table he lit on a cheap necklace, some literature of more than doubtful nature, a girl's

photograph torn into four, and a heap of miscellaneous bills.

Knowing, as he did, the fate of his predecessor, these things saddened John to a degree, and the sudden discovery of a neatly-mounted pathological specimen in a glass jar, evidence of previous industry and talent on the part of its dissector, nearly made him gulp. Here was a cheerful beginning! thought he, they might have had the decency to clear out these sordid relics. Some one must be responsible for the neglect.

In considerable irritation he rang a bell he discovered by the door. In a few minutes he heard elastic footsteps approaching, there was a gentle knock at the door, and a girl in servant's cap and apron came in. The appearance of this girl in his dingy room resembled that of a primrose in a ditch. She was of middle height, slightly made, but plump. She carried herself exceptionally well, and the customary tight-fitting black dress showed off her almost perfect figure to the best advantage. Her complexion was red and white, and contrasted vividly with black hair and eyes.

She looked somewhat coquettishly at John, but said demurely enough :

“ You rang, sir ; can I get you anything ? ”

“ I want some hot water,” he said coldly, “ and you can clear away the *tea*.”

The girl busied herself with the tray, at intervals shooting curious glances under her long lashes at John, who, for his part, gazed indifferently out of the window. The spruceness of the girl, contrasted with

the dirt and disorder of his room, only served to increase his annoyance. So, when she delivered his hot water, and smiled archly at him, he stared sternly at her, and said deliberately :

“ I shall expect these rooms cleaned thoroughly by to-morrow, and that rubbish,” indicating the open cupboards and drawers, “ cleared away. You are neglecting your work here, and there must be a radical change. What is your name ? ” he added.

The girl’s smile faded, her fine dark eyes became round with half-frightened surprise.

“ Rose, sir,” she said, timidly.

Here was a new kind of A.M.O. ! The last had never grumbled at her, and instead of frowning, had been wont to pinch her cheek, and put his arm round that slim waist of hers, and once or twice had succeeded in stealing a kiss.

“ I shall be at Dr. Smith’s to dinner to-night,” went on John. “ I shall want calling half-an-hour before breakfast, and I want a bath.”

“ The bath room is the first door in the passage, sir,” she replied respectfully. “ And breakfast the doctor usually had at ten—in bed,” with a blush.

“ I’ll have mine at nine,” returned John. “ That will do, Rose.”

She said :

“ Thank you, sir,” and left the room, to tell the cook that “ she’d have to mind her P’s and Q’s with the new doctor’s meals, or there’d be ructions.”

As John turned to go to the bath room, he glanced

out of his window—and stopped. There was Dr. Smith, hurrying in evident agitation up the lane on the left of the drive. In one hand he carried a small black bag, and in the other a bottle. John watched him with curiosity, and saw him enter the coachman's cottage.

Towards eight o'clock John duly presented himself at the superintendent's house. Mrs. Dennis received him quite without embarrassment, remarking that Dr. Smith was out, but that she expected him in every moment.

“Would Dr. Fownes smoke?” She handed him cigarettes. “Did he like his rooms? She hoped he would be comfortable, and find the work interesting. Had he any hobbies? It was always wise to cultivate such in asylums.”

He replied suitably, lied about his rooms, said he had had no time for hobbies since he qualified. Then she questioned him about his tastes in amusements, art, literature and music, his hospital life, etc., and listened to his responses with interest, seeming to make mental notes. And John found himself replying sincerely, and without mental reservation, though it was plain to him that he was an object of study, and was undergoing a process of cross-examination. But the earnestness of his interlocutor disarmed any tendency he might have felt to flippancy or evasion. He was puzzled, but was growing so used to little mystifications in this place, that he felt no surprise. She evidently wished to ignore her visit to him in London, so he took his cue, and said nothing about it.

Presently he heard a latchkey inserted into the front door. His hostess excused herself, went out, and shut the door behind her. There was a whispered colloquy in the hall, and then a door shut upstairs.

John sat smoking, and meditating upon this curious household for fully ten minutes before the door opened, and Dr. Smith came in. He was dressed for dinner, but looked haggard and exhausted.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Fownes," he said, "I was called away to see a patient in the town. The committee allow me to do some consulting practice, you know."

This seemed strange to John. He had heard no carriage wheels. Surely Smith hadn't walked the ten miles!

"Not at all," he replied. "Mrs. Dennis has been kind enough to make the time pass very quickly."

During dinner Smith brightened considerably, and discussed the town and its inhabitants with much energy. John learnt that Rudford was only a few miles from a cathedral city, and strove to emulate its stately neighbour in everything. Its inhabitants liked to imagine their largest parish church a cathedral, and some even alluded to it as such in conversation, and to its rector as "the dean." Dr. Smith hated the church, and was always more or less at enmity with the town. He was delighted to obtain a new listener, and gave John his opinions freely, and with gusto.

"The only persons of any account to the amblyopic inhabitants of this place," he observed, "are the

clergy. They run the whole show. The town is black with them. In addition to the unavoidable furniture of the parish churches, all kinds of adventitious fry connected with the cathedral live here. What they do, or if they ever do anything in the way of work, heaven only knows, but they pocket good salaries. I hope you are not a worshipper of the cloth ? ”

“ No, if anything, the reverse,” replied John. “ But I suppose they are, after all, much like other men.”

“ That’s because you don’t know them as I do. You wait until you’ve lived here for a while. I have a hobby—classification,” he went on, “ and parsons, like other diseases, lend themselves naturally to grouping. The first group comprises what may be called the BLATANT type. This is susceptible of division into two sub-groups : (1) The frankly worldly, social aspiring ; (2) the self-righteous intolerant bigot. Another group is the SYCOPHANTS, sub-divided into : (1) Society hangers-on, who toady to the rich and mighty ; (2) place seekers, who toady to their episcopal superiors. Most of the elder dignitaries come under one of these two main divisions. The third—— ”

“ Your dinner’s getting cold,” interjected Mrs. Dennis, smiling.

“ Never mind, my dear,” said Smith, continuing. “ The third and last group may be called the CYPHERS, again divisible into two : (1) The calves—athletic, brainless youths, who ought to have been navvies ; (2) the anti-social book-worms, harmless but degenerate.”

John's amusement at this indictment did not prevent him noticing Dr. Smith's "My dear," addressed to Mrs. Dennis.

"There is no doubt a good deal of truth in your classification," he said, "but I don't think it includes all parsons."

"Of course not," agreed Mrs. Dennis. "Some are very good men, our own chaplain, for instance."

"Yes, he is a curious chap," said Smith, "the most unsuitable man for a parson I ever met. Yet somehow the staff here worship him. He is not resident, or he might be inclined to interfere outside his sphere."

"He is very nervous, Dr. Fownes," said Mrs. Dennis, "but very kind and charitable."

"In fact he's rather an ass," remarked Smith. "But there must be some good in him, because the other clerics hate him like poison. He is a great radical, treats all men as brothers, and that sort of rubbish, even the said clerics. He does a good deal of voluntary work in the town, runs a sort of week-night mission, quite unconnected with any church, and draws large congregations, which contrasting with the scant Sunday assemblies in the churches, annoys the other ravens extremely."

"I don't care for those sort of men myself," observed John. "Their idea of brotherhood usually displays itself in the form of impertinent interference in their neighbours' private concerns."

"Quite," agreed Smith. "My idea of fraternal conduct is to let a man alone until he asks your help. The constant desire to improve others is, to

my mind, an abnormal trait. If a man's conduct interferes with, or annoys, his neighbours, it ought to be stopped, and, in fact, the law does so, but if he himself is the only sufferer, I say, let him alone."

John happened to look up at this remark, and his gaze was arrested by the pallor of Mrs. Dennis' face. She caught his surprised scrutiny, and blushed scarlet. John looked hastily away and said,

"Are there any decent people to know round here?"

"We know very few," replied Smith, rather astonished at this sudden change of subject; "as I told you, they are all priest-ridden, and we don't want that sort."

"Then you know," supplemented Mrs. Dennis, "Dr. Smith is always busy, and I am a stay-at-home sort of person, so we do not entertain much."

"What is more likely," thought John involuntarily, "is that people won't know you. I hope to goodness *I* get to know some. Much of this sort of conversation would bore me stiff. It reminds me of Boyne, damn him!"

It never occurred to him that the relations he suspected between Smith and Mrs. Dennis were identical with those he had planned between himself and Alice Boyne. So different do things appear in others.

Presently Mrs. Dennis said "Good-night," and left the men alone, for Smith made John smoke another cigarette before going.

"Will you give me a rough idea of my duties?" asked John.

“ You start your morning round about ten,” replied Smith, “ and walk through the asylum. You look at those who are ill, chat with those who are quiet, settle disputes, investigate complaints, punish wrong-doers, and try to get to know your patients. At present things are quiet ; you will not have to do much, but begin to learn their names. Then, when you have finished, come into my office, and tell me your impressions.”

“ I suppose someone will go round with me ? ”

“ Yes, the matron, and head attendant respectively. You can rely pretty well upon the matron, but the other is a liar, and very thick-headed.”

“ Do you use much in the way of sedatives ? ”

“ Nobody wants anything ordering to-morrow. If anyone gets excited, tell me,” said Smith.

“ What do I do after lunch ? ”

“ Nothing, or rather, anything you like. You can go out most days. But at six you go round again, and once more before you turn in.”

“ I think I’ll do the last now,” said John, looking at the clock.

“ Wait a minute,” said Smith, “ and I will get your key, and come over with you. This key,” he added, handing one to John, “ opens every door in the asylum. Now come along, and I’ll show you the surgery.”

They went over to the asylum, and taking John into the surgery, Smith produced a lantern from a cupboard and gave it to him.

“ To light you on your night round,” he said.

“If you start now, you will just catch the patrol attendants in ward 1 or 2.”

He bid John “Good-night,” and went home.

John lit his lamp, and started. He inserted his key into the door giving access to the male division. The lock would not turn until he discovered another below it, and freed that, when the first fell back with a sonorous “cluck.” He stepped into the ward, and closed the door noiselessly behind him. This, being the day room, was empty, and there was a dead silence. The yellow strand of light from his lantern only served to accentuate the general blackness. The chill night air blowing in gusts through the windows made him shiver, and the peculiar sickly smell of a sleeping asylum filled his nostrils. There was no sign of attendants. A feeling of absolute isolation came over him, causing a momentary impulse to turn back; but his obstinacy would not allow that. He strode resolutely across the ward to a dark patch, as it appeared by the light of his lantern, on the opposite wall. He inserted his key, when a voice remarked at his elbow, out of the darkness:

“You shall not, you devil! Will you slit her throat? Not so, the telephomagnetic screening blocks hell. Is it not? Her devil’s throat is slit!”

John repressed his reflex start, but his heart thumped violently, and his forehead grew damp. He turned slowly towards the voice. His lamp displayed merely the door of a single room, one of six that lined the right hand wall of the day-room. He laughed uneasily, and again turned his attention

to the door he wished to open. It yielded at once to his key. He swung his lamp round ; it revealed twenty-nine peaceful sleepers, and one patient sitting up in bed. The dormitory, with its resemblance to a hospital ward, restored all John's nerve.

He approached the wakeful patient, and enquired for the night-attendants. The man recognised him at once, and told him the patrol had just been through ; if he hurried he would catch them in the next ward.

Events justified his expectation, the attendants heard him approaching, and waited. They saluted.

" Going round now, sir ? " enquired the senior.

" Yes," said John ; " lead the way."

The attendants stopped at the door of a single room.

" James Lowton won't stay in bed," said the head night-attendant.

" Oh, where is he ? "

He opened the door, and exhibited a man standing up, shivering and nude. One coarse rug lay in the corner of the room, but no bed or bedding was visible.

" Where is his bed ? " asked John.

" Oh, 'is bed ? He doesn't have a bed, sir ; he is destructive."

" Does he destroy a bed if given him ? "

" Yes, sir."

" When did he do so last ? "

" Last ? Oh, about nine months ago. We ain't given him a chance since ! " triumphantly.

" He goes off sudden."

“ Will you tear up a bed if we give you one ? ” said John to the patient.

“ Good Lord, no ! I’m not such a bl— fool ! ” answered the man with emphasis. “ I never tore up a bed. I was delirious, get regular turns of it, and they say I picked the tucks out of a mattress.”

“ Give him a bed and bedclothes,” said John sharply.

One of the attendants went off to get these, and John proceeded on his round with the other.

“ Anything else wrong in here ? ” said John.

“ Only Samuel Mullin, complainin’ of tooth-ache.”

“ Is it bad ; keep him awake ? ”

“ No, sir.”

Just then a howl startled John.

“ What’s that ? ”

“ Mullin, sir. Just a minute, sir.” He left John, and opened a single room at the other end of the ward. The doctor followed, and heard this :

“ If you don’t shut up, blast you, I’ll get you bedded for a week, and stop you from the dance, you noisy dog ! ”

“ Is that how you usually address the patients ? ” said John, with ominous quietness.

The man flushed, and stammered some excuse about this being an “ aggravating man, enough to try the patience of a saint.”

“ Don’t talk to me about saints ! ” said John, “ and don’t let anything like that come even indirectly to my ears again, or I shall ask Dr. Smith to take steps to prevent it.”

The attendant grinned in the darkness. John looked into the single room, and saw the patient's face. The jaw was swollen with a large angry abscess, that must give the man acute pain.

"How long have you had that?" asked John.

"About a week," mumbled the patient.

"Is nothing done for it?" to the attendant.

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"Dr. Smith said it would get right itself in time, it was no use wasting dressings on it."

John bit his lip.

"Wait here," said he.

He went down, found the necessary instruments and dressings, opened and dressed the abscess.

"Now, what next?" he said, when he had finished.

"Nothing here, sir. Some patients in the Infirmary ward you might look at, sir."

They went there. One man was unconscious, with cold extremities, a bluish pallor and stertorous respiration.

"What's wrong with him?" asked John.

"It's 'is brain, sir."

He was duly examined, and found to exhibit no signs of gross brain-disease.

"Is he taking any sedative?"

"Yes, sir."

"What?"

"Sulphonal, sir."

"Do you know how much?"

"Three powders a day." The man fetched the box from the ward medicine cupboard. John read,

“one powder to be taken three times a day. (Sulphonal grs. 30).”

“How long has he been on these powders?”

“About ten days, sir.”

“Very well,” said John, “Let us go on.”

He saw that the patient was poisoned, and that nothing could be done. The attendants also knew it. But it was an ‘accident!’ The man had had too big a dose for too long, but nothing less would *quieten* him. Some men might have stood it. What would you have? Such cases would happen at times under their system. It was no use making a fuss. The two attendants, infirmary and patrol, admired John’s apparent indifference. But John was not indifferent by any means. His attention was drawn to another patient, evidently suffering from some acute abdominal mischief.

“Has Dr. Smith seen him since he’s been so bad?” he asked.

“Yes, sir, this morning.”

“Did he say anything about an operation?”

“No, sir. He said nothing could be done.”

Now John knew that an operation might save the man, but under the circumstances he could take no steps.

John met several cases similar to these as he traversed the asylum on this, his first, round. Quiet, freedom from “trouble,” and economy, were the watch-words, accomplished by rigorous discipline, drugs, and a policy of *laissez-faire* in treatment.

Returning to his room, he suddenly heard light

quick footsteps behind him. He turned and beheld the head night-nurse coming down the corridor towards him; he waited. She was a tall dark upright girl, and moved with the easy grace betokening perfect physical symmetry.

"Oh, doctor," she said quietly, but eyeing him full, "will you come back and see Jane Weeks? She seems very bad."

"What's the matter with her, nurse?"

"I don't know," she replied. "She is in pain."

"Where?" asked John, turning to go with her to the ward.

The girl cast down her eyes with such mock modesty that he nearly laughed.

"She is in pain, doctor; that is all I know."

"Only just come on—been well all day?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Sick?"

"The ward-nurse will know, doctor."

"Is she a recent admission?"

"No, sir, she has been in two years."

The nurse subjected John to a searching feminine scrutiny as they traversed the wards and corridors together, managing to keep him in the light of her lantern and herself in the shadow. We are not privileged to read this young lady's mind, but she tripped on a stair, and would have fallen but for the doctor's suddenly outstretched arm.

"Thank you, doctor," she said sweetly, smiling into his eyes. "How silly of me."

"Beastly stone steps—slippery, too," remarked John.

Presently they arrived at the dormitory where the patient, Jane Weeks, slept. The ward night-nurse met them on the threshold and led them to a single room. Sighs issued from this, that somehow sounded familiar to the doctor. He followed the nurse into the room.

Presently he emerged with a white face, and turning to the nurse, said abruptly :

“ I am going over to see Dr. Smith. Watch her carefully until I come back.”

This he did, and Dr. Smith came down in dressing-gown and pyjamas.

“ Hallo, Dr. Fownes,” said he in surprise, “ what’s wrong ? ”

John told him. Dr. Smith whistled in dismay.

“ All right, I’ll come,” he said ; “ smoke a cigarette while I get into some clothes.”

They returned to the asylum together, and went up to see the patient. The two doctors entered the single room, and the superintendent examined her in his turn. Presently they called for some surgical requisites and two chairs.

They remained with the patient for half-an-hour.

Then Dr. Smith came out, rubbing his hands with satisfaction. John followed.

“ A most fortunate termination,” the superintendent was saying, “ the fact of still-birth has saved a lot of unpleasant gossip, the presentation” and here he went off into technicalities.

Fownes listened without a word, and presently went up to his room sick at heart.

Here he found a change for the better. The room

had been swept and garnished. A cheerful fire burnt in the grate, and on the table reposed a brightly polished copper tray, bearing cocoa and biscuits.

And beside the latter was an envelope addressed to himself. He stared at it a moment incredulous of his own senses, stunned by surprise. The superscription was in Alice Boyne's handwriting. Then he roused himself, snatched it up, with trembling fingers tore it open, and devoured it.

He read the following :

“ DEAR JACK,

I know how surprised you will be to read this. But, oh, I do hope you will see the wisdom of it. I am compelled to write to you because if you saw me you might exclaim, or do something unusual, and you are bound to see me in a few days ! And I am sure that we ought not to see each other, but fate has somehow brought us together again, and I am so happy ! I shall see your dear face so soon, but alas, only for a little while. Oh, dear ! to think that I have to write like this to my darling, but what can we do ? Indeed, I ought not to write in this way at all. So now I will explain to you how I came here.

“ It is wonderful how Providence works, but not always how we want. How wicked I am become ! Did you not get my note, dear Jack ; I mean the one I wrote before I came away ? I thought I gave it to the maid to post. Perhaps *he* got possession of it. I hope you have not grieved much, my dear boy—I have. But there, I must tell you.

“ I came down here to my sister Eileen. I expect you saw her when you were a kiddie in the village, and may remember how, after her trouble, she left home. She went to Dr. Rogers, who had always been kind to her, with the idea of becoming a nurse, and he got his friend, Dr. Smith here, to make her a nurse in the asylum. I have always corresponded with her. She knows all about us, dear, and is very good and wise. (“ Ah ! ” said John.)

“ When you came down here on approval, and she heard your name, she was, I mean we were, dreadfully cut up, and she tried, as you know, to prevent you taking the post. Oh, cruel ! Of course, Dr. Smith knows nothing about you and me, and when I came down three weeks ago, Eileen got him to let me be a nurse too.

“ When we heard you were coming, she wanted me to get away before you came, and wrote to my old nurse, but obtained no reply, so I had nowhere to go ; besides, she, I mean we, could think of no excuse to give Dr. Smith. So we decided that I must stay here until my month’s trial is up, on the 23rd, and she has written to a brother of nurse’s to find out if she has left her old address. But, oh, dear ! what will become of us ? What will be the end ? Eileen insists that we must not write to one another when I go, that you must not even know where I am then. And I suppose she is right. Oh, dear, oh, dear !

“ God bless you, my dear boy,

“ Your unhappy

“ ALICE.”

John read this logical and grammatical, but eminently feminine, script, with varying emotions. He kissed the letter repeatedly, but shook his fist.

“Mrs. Dennis,” he vowed, “though you are her sister, you are my enemy! But I will beat you yet! My poor darling begins to write under your influence, but her own dear self soon breaks through your austerities. You! to be so rigid!”

But John was not one to meet future troubles half-way. His Alice was within a stone’s throw of him. What happiness! Let the future look after itself. He would in some way contrive to outwit her sister. Having read the letter five times, he settled himself in an arm-chair before the fire, lit his pipe, and proceeded to read it again.

Eventually he went to bed, tired out by the varied emotions and excitement of the day. Yet he slept fitfully, and dreamed vivid dreams. He would start from his sleep, imagining he heard the groans of the parturient patient, or the voice of his sweetheart. Presently he partially awoke, thinking he felt a pressure on his leg. He tried to stretch it out, and opened dazzled eyes sleepily. A light was shining full in his face. He started up in bed.

Then a soft soothing voice he seemed to know, said gently :

“It’s all right, doctor, don’t be startled,” and the light was turned from his face to his interlocutor’s. With a gasp he recognised the head night-nurse, sitting on his bed.

“What the devil!” he exclaimed. “Is something wrong, or am I still dreaming?”

“ No, doctor. Everything is all right.”

“ Then what on earth are you doing here ? ”

The girl smiled demurely, but shot a glance of very different character at him from under her dark lashes.

“ Why,” she replied, almost caressingly, “ I thought you might be restless, and—lonely on your own, after all the worry of that case, and came to keep you company for a bit.”

John was hardly awake ; too bewildered to think clearly. The girl might be actuated by kindly motives and sympathy, but surely her conduct was rather remarkable, even for this somewhat peculiar place. He made no further remark, and silence reigned for a space. The nurse still sat on the bed. They looked at each other. He observed vaguely, and for the first time, that she was a very handsome girl. Her heavy lidded eyes were like sloes ; her smooth black hair framed a perfectly oval pale face, with aquiline nose and lips delicately cut, not red, but coral pink in tint. Then he noticed also that she had discarded her cap and uniform, and was wrapped in a dressing-gown.

He was amazed and felt himself grow hot.

“ You look warm,” she said in a low voice ; “ it’s cold out there in the ward. I used to come and sit with the other doctors on cold nights.”

Her eyes burned and she breathed quickly.

John simply stared at her. The conviction was growing in his somnolent mind that the girl was part of the phantasy of his dreams. The whole incident was so ridiculously impossible.

Then she suddenly took his hand and pressed it with warm fingers. Then he thoroughly awoke.

“ Well I’m damned ! ” he ejaculated ; “ this has actually happened ! ” Then he laughed and looked again at the nurse. Her eyes fell before the cold amusement in his.

“ Go to bed, nurse,” he said lightly.

“ Why ? ” She stood up with heaving breast and wrapped her gown around her.

John shrugged his shoulders and laughed again unpleasantly.

She bridled at the contempt in it.

“ You pluckless puritan ! ” she flashed angrily. “ The last doctor was not such a sweet innocent ! ”

Again he laughed, but his expression changed. The laugh was hearty, and his demeanour not devoid of nobility.

“ Puritan ! I ? Not a whit. Just an ordinary rotter, nurse, but with his word plighted, and his heart occupied.”

“ You are in love ! ”

“ Rather ! For years.”

The girl was silent awhile, and gazed at him with an inscrutable expression in her dark eyes. Then she tossed her head and said scornfully :

“ Well ! Of all the namby-pamby boys, and I thought, by the look of you, that you were a man ! ”

And with a swirl of her gown she took herself off.

John became serious again. “ To you, Alice, dear,” he said aloud, as if speaking to one present. Then, after a pause, “ My God, what a ruddy

place ! ” Then he tumbled into bed again to sleep like a child until called by his hebe.

It is necessary to return and trace Alice Boyne's movements after her husband's discovery of her secret.

As the reader is aware, she had decided to leave her husband.

She considered that her refusal of John's entreaties had more than atoned, in view of her husband's bearing toward her on that night, for her fault in loving her old sweetheart. She was bitterly indignant and mortified at Boyne's virtual accusation of unfaithfulness, and now felt herself alone to be the aggrieved party. She thought she was completely justified in going away, and as this would free her from the necessity of leading the double life that had so sapped her peace of mind, her anger at her husband's suspicion was not unmixed with a feeling of relief.

She had soon decided where she would go. Indeed, she had not much choice. She dared not go home. It would break her father's heart if his other daughter's name became the subject of gossip. Moreover, he would try to patch up the breach between herself and Boyne, and this, in her present mood, was the very last thing she desired. Then at the bottom of her heart she felt that her father would not hold her blameless, and she was in no mind to suffer rebuke.

The homes of other relations were closed to her by the necessity of explanations, and because her presence there would eventually come to her father's

ears. She had sense enough to realize that, with her upbringing, she would have the greatest difficulty in earning a livelihood. The sum of twenty pounds she had actually in hand would not long support her.

There was only one person to whom she could turn, her sister Eileen. Alice alone of all the family and its friends, knew her sister's whereabouts. She had maintained a correspondence with her ever since Eileen in her misery had fled from home, and found a quiet haven in a distant county.

Alice had no difficulty in determining upon her course of action with regard to her husband—she wished never to see him again—but, as to her future intercourse with John Fownes, she had reached no decision. She was resolved, of course, to do nothing that she considered wrong. Her pressing need was to get away from them both, and confide her troubles to her sister. She wrote a note to her husband, and another to Fownes, but, in the hurry of departure, left them both on her dressing table. Both fell into her husband's hands.

She finished packing in time to take a cab at 5 a.m., long before her husband was stirring. Two sleepy maids carried her trunk to the cab, and she drove away with a sigh of relief.

“Her conduct is inexcusable. She leaves her home, and the husband she has deceived, without a regret, merely because he has found out her deception, and in the shock of the discovery suspected her of the almost inevitable outcome of such intrigues.”

So says a virtuous lady who reads these pages.

Perhaps you are right, madam. But consider. Alice was united to a man, whose lofty mind could only condescend to share with her its froth, who habitually gave her credit for the intelligence and culture of a scullery-maid, for the religious feeling and standpoint of a Turk, and the habits of a trifler—when she had never before thought that there was so very much wrong with her—a man whose whole attitude exuded moral disapproval and intellectual contempt, whose affection for her was that of a Sultan for his harem.

And this has been the state of affairs for many weary months.

Then remember she does not love this man (some women, my dear sir, cherish a sort of dog-like affection for such men) but an honest impetuous boy. She has been imprudent, no more, and then to crown all, her husband chooses to believe the worst of her in spite of her denial. Ought she to continue to live with him?

Perhaps she should. It is even possible that she would thus be acting rightly. Of such stuff are made either martyrs or fools. Our Alice is no martyr. We trust she is not so foolish as her husband professes to think her. In this particular instance she certainly is not.

The reader must now be acquainted briefly with the early history of the elder sister, Eileen.

Mrs. Dayncourt died when Eileen was sixteen years old, and Alice four, there being twelve years between them. Eileen was affianced by her father,

at the age of eighteen, to the talented heir of a diamond-mine owner, hailing immediately from South Africa, and originally, unkind persons said, from Whitechapel. Any inequalities, such as birth (which needless to say the squire worshipped) were nicely levelled by the piles of precious stones the lucky youth was prepared to spread at his fiancée's feet.

This equitable arrangement—coats-of-arms on one side and carbuncles on the other—was unfortunately marred by Eileen's ridiculously romantic disposition. The silly girl actually advanced the objection that she did not *love* Mr. Stronheimervitz! Why even the squire would have been surprised if she had. In the end the engagement was broken off, and so Eileen lost her diamonds, and I am sure my sensible readers will agree with me when I say it served her right.

Now Eileen's unreasonable dislike for Mr. Stronheimervitz was strengthened by an even more absurd liking for somebody else.

One of the squire's largest tenants was a farmer named Strong. This was an intelligent man, who had received a good education, and gave his son an even better one. Dick Strong went to a public school, and Cambridge, and distinguished himself, if not in scholarship, at various sports. Afterwards he studied scientific agriculture, and came home to help his father with the farm. Dick was the champion footballer and boxer of the village, and took a leading part on the Libtor side in local politics. Old Mr. Strong was also a Libtor, and

much respected in the village. He was a proud old chap, and with stupid independence would never truckle to the squire, his landlord, but was inclined in his dealings with that potentate to assert his opinions, and infer an equality between them. Now this was not only reprehensible, but silly, for the squire, in addition to being a Torlib, was, as we have stated, his landlord.

It is not to be wondered that the Hon. A. Dayncourt did not love Mr. Strong. Nor was his affection increased by the knowledge that the only superiority he could claim over his tenant was that of greater possessions. For the Strongs had been farmers, yeomen, and long ago knights and gentlemen in the district for six hundred years.

Dick was quite unlike his father in this respect ; he cared nothing about his forbears, but on the contrary held in proper awe the powers that reigned in the village, namely the squire and rector. He was frequently to be seen chewing a straw behind the plough. But he had other uses also. On a certain market-day he enjoyed the honour of receiving a black eye and split scalp from a gang of hop-pickers who were molesting Eileen Dayncourt in a lane. He knocked out two of them, threw one in a ditch, and the other two bolted. He went home whistling after this exploit, and thought no more about it. Not so the lady for whom he had fought. The image of this young Mars knocking down blackguards on her behalf remained in her heart. One day she met him, thanked him, and he blushed ; another, she found him sitting on a

gate chewing his straw, and chaffed him about his rainbow-tinted orbit, and he said he was jolly glad he got it. On another occasion she questioned him about his work; he unfolded his schemes for doubling the yield per acre, and she was sympathetic and interested. Then, might she see his crops? She did, and had tea with his mother. Once again he overtook her in his gig, and gave her a lift home—well, nearly home.

Sad to relate, we cannot vouch for the accidental nature of these meetings. The last incident came to her father's knowledge. He lectured her severely upon the evils of condescending to accept favours from one's inferiors, for her lack of proper dignity and reserve, and she said nothing. Little did the poor gentleman know the degree of intimacy developing between his daughter and this plebeian fellow. But Eileen was an obstinate girl, and when a dance took place at the neighbouring Town Hall, she danced most of the vales and lancers with the young farmer. On that evening Dick had the incredible presumption to ask her to marry him. Her disgraceful conduct at this ball made the poor squire furious, and he expressed his views on the subject freely to his daughter when he reached home. The undutiful girl evinced no penitence, she simply cried when she had gained her own room.

The next morning in great trepidation Dick waited upon the squire. The latter received him with haughty frigidity. Poor Dick stuck to his guns, and asked the squire plump for his elder daughter's hand. We will not bore the reader by

recording the father's remarks on the subject of this unheard-of impertinence, they were much as you would make yourself, Mr. Solicitor, if the butcher's son aspired to marry your daughter, always supposing that the aforesaid dealer trafficked in individual bullocks, and not shiploads! Mr. Dayncourt, very properly, commented on the amazing insolence of a "ploughboy," the insult offered to his family, etc., etc., and left the presumptuous youth absolutely crushed. The doughty fighter went home in tears, and told his father. That gentleman's observations were worthy of his cavalier ancestors. He made a point of meeting his landlord the same day, and gave him his opinion so freely that the squire nearly sustained a cerebral hemorrhage on the spot, as a result of his rage.

And now it is with sorrow we record it, that abandoned girl Eileen actually married Dick Strong. Can it be wondered that shortly afterwards her deeply aggrieved and insulted father found that he needed Strong's farm for a plantation, and turned him out? That he refused ever to see his daughter inside his doors again? Is it not natural that he should bring his influence to bear upon the farmer's creditors (for the most part also the squire's tenants) to press him for money that they had previously been content to wait for, and thus make him bankrupt?

As we have stated before, Dick helped to work his father's farm, so when the smash came he and his wife were penniless. He became farm-bailiff to a neighbouring gentleman, and settled in a cottage

with Eileen, and thirty-five shillings a week. Out of this they allowed the elder Strongs ten shillings weekly.

Eileen tried hard to make her own little home happy, and to make ends meet—she who never knew the value of a shilling. But secretly she missed the comfort and luxury of her father's house, and pined for his and her sister's affection. Alice dared not pay her a visit, but somehow she contrived to convey little notes to her. The younger sister never knew the part her father had played in the ruin of the Strongs, indeed she was too young to understand.

Eileen began to find that she was of very little use in her husband's home, her ideas appeared extravagant, and she knew nothing about house-keeping. It made her very unhappy. They had to employ a little servant, and thus fell into debt. The worry of her estrangement from her family, her own uselessness, their increasingly bad pecuniary position, grew heavier to Eileen, and together with poor food, told upon her health and spirits. She became pale, languid, and thin, but tried to show a cheerful front to her husband.

But Dick, who loved her so passionately, saw it all. He felt he had brought her to misery and want, that she regretted her choice, and it broke his heart. So one morning six months after they were married, the squire received a letter imploring him to take his daughter back, and Dick was cut down by a labourer from an oak-tree, to which he was attached by a cord around his neck. He did

not die, but from that day he began to drink heavily.

The squire drove over in reply to Dick's letter, but his daughter stigmatised him as her husband's murderer, and incontinently turned him out of her cottage.

One morning, shortly after this, Dick was again missing. Search was made high and low, but no sign of him was found. A couple of days later his wife received a letter from him posted in London. In this he entreated her to return to her father's home, to be happy and forget him, he asked her pardon for his cruel mistake in marrying her, and said that if by an unlikely chance instead of dying of drink, as he anticipated, he should live to make a competence within seven years he would come to claim her. If she heard nothing before the end of that period he would have passed permanently out of her life.

We pass over the wife's desolation after this catastrophe. She did not go back to her father's house, but slipped away to London. She stayed with a former school-fellow for a while. She was resolved, however, not to be dependent upon others for her livelihood. Moreover, she urgently needed money to send to the Strongs, her parents-in-law.

After much discussion it was decided that she should train as a nurse. Having no idea how to set about it, she called upon Dr. Rogers, whom she had known for some years as the family adviser, and trusted; and after binding him to secrecy, asked his help and advice. Eventually, by his aid, she became duly enrolled as a probationer at one of

the great London Hospitals. She posed as a young widow, and went under the name of Mrs. Dennis. Earning little money she pawned the remnants of her jewellery, and sent the proceeds to old Mr. Strong.

But she was not destined to find rest there. An assistant surgeon grew enamoured of her beauty, and repeatedly asked her to marry him. At length his attentions became so insistent that she left the Hospital in despair.

She again sought Dr. Rogers' help. It happened that the latter's friend, Dr. Smith, was in need of a good Charge Nurse, and Rogers, with some hesitation, mentioned this post to Eileen. He explained to her the gulf that lay between asylum and hospital nursing, but she jumped at it. So Dr. Smith was communicated with and in due course Eileen was installed as a nurse at the Rudford County Asylum. Here her salary was poor, and her father-in-law continued in great pecuniary difficulties.

Since he went away she had heard nothing from nor concerning her husband, neither did she know whether he were alive, but she believed him dead.

Her early experience at Rudford was unpropitious and for a while she was very unhappy. The misery of the patients, regarded by her as inseparable from their condition, and the monotony of the life weighed heavily upon her spirits. The other nurses perceiving that her tastes and nature differed materially from their own remained rather aloof from her. Their main thoughts and objects in

life—their “young men,” interested her not at all, nor was she in sympathy with their attitude towards them.

She felt lonely and isolated.

Dr. Smith, after their first official interview, she saw only occasionally, but such times as they met he invariably enquired kindly after her happiness and well-being. And she began to value and look for his friendly greetings. These sometimes became almost conversations. Then once or twice he had overtaken her in her solitary walks into the town, where he appeared to have business, and they had traversed the few miles together. His conversation was interesting, his manner deferential and sympathetic. She told him some of her unhappy history. Eileen grew to like and esteem him. To meet him thus occasionally, cheered her.

By degrees the moral atmosphere of the place, the polluted language and conduct of the insane she was compelled to hear and witness, began to exercise their inevitable effect upon this solitary woman.

Her sensibility began to be blunted.

She grew to view with more indulgent eyes the amorous escapades of her fellow nurses, their moral cowardice and unthinking harshness.

Of this she herself was unconscious. A certain hard recklessness of demeanour characteristic of asylum nurses gradually replaced her former modest mien.

She was a woman standing alone with none to care whether she stood or fell, with no one to love,

to strive upward for, to affect by her example or influence, a woman of whom nothing was expected, to whom no one looked for help or inspiration. A rudderless boat caught in an inexorable torrent.

Show me such a woman so situated and I will show you a thief, a wanton, a lost soul.

But just as she began to drift down the stereotyped asylum river of brutalisation her course was diverted into a sheltered but treacherous backwater by a current that subsequently overwhelmed her.

The reader has guessed the sequel. She grew to love Dr. Smith because he was someone who asked her love, someone to fill her hungry heart, to live for, to help. What part then had the asylum environment played in the production of this result?

In order to be whirled into the backwater, the skiff must be drifting on the river.

So Eileen became Dr. Smith's housekeeper and mistress, and old Mr. Strong's pecuniary embarrassments ceased to exist.

“ Let him that is without sin———”

* * * * *

From the first her sister Alice had kept up a correspondence with her. Of late years they had also contrived to meet surreptitiously in London when Mr. Dayncourt brought Alice up for the season.

The squire, considerably aged by his trouble, centred his whole affections upon Alice, and as we have seen, married her according to his wishes. (The reader who has hitherto regarded her as an

unmitigated fool for marrying Mr. Boyne, may perhaps be induced to modify her opinion in the light of the further history just related). He desired to hold no communication with his elder daughter, nor would he allow Alice to speak of her, but he permitted her to receive letters from Eileen. The latter learnt from Alice all about her love affair with John Fownes, and was the more astonished when she married the Rev. James Boyne. Indeed, Eileen blamed her. But what could she say after the unhappy result of her own love match? Subsequently to her marriage Alice's letters contained no news of personal interest. She barely mentioned her husband, and said nothing of their incompatibility, nor any word of John Fownes' reappearance.

So when Eileen received a telegram from Alice on the morning of the latter's departure from London and her husband's roof, couched as follows—

“Am leaving here. Coming to you to-day,” she was as much puzzled as pleased.

CHAPTER IX

THE sisters were very attached to each other, and their meeting was full of affection. The elder, with her arm round her sister, listened to the unhappy details of Alice's married life with anxious sympathy. Eileen made few comments, and only evasive replies when appealed to for approbation.

"And what shall I do now, Eilie, and have I done right?" asked Alice in conclusion.

"Dearest, you must forgive me," said Eileen. "I am not sure that you were right to leave your husband as you did."

"I can't help it," said Alice miserably. "I could not stay with him after that accusation, and I know he never would have been convinced."

"It may be so. Perhaps your absence will soften him, and you may learn to think more kindly of each other after a while."

"No," said Alice with conviction. "I shall never change to him, and if you knew him you would know he never would to me. You, dearest, loved your husband, and he loved you. I hate mine! And he is so hard that in any case he couldn't forgive even my running away."

"Oh, my dear little girl, try not to be so bitter."

Then, as Alice's lips began to quiver, she added more cheerfully,

“ But we won't talk about that any more now. There is one thing, though, you must do, hard though it be, that is give up John Fownes.”

“ What do you mean, Eileen ? ” said Alice timidly. “ I have left him. Must I cease to love him ? I cannot do that.”

“ I know that, dearie, not all at once,” said the elder woman sadly. “ But you must hold no communication with him. Oh, Alice, be advised by me,” she went on earnestly. “ Try to live without, and to forget him *now*. I mean begin at once. Don't I know how hard it will be ? But God knows it is worth it ! ”

Alice was rather dismayed by her sister's vehemence, and made no reply.

“ Fortunately he does not know where you are,” continued Eileen, “ and so your task will be easier, and there is no reason why he should find out.”

“ No,” said Alice, her mouth drooping pathetically. “ But you misjudge him, Eilie, I am sure he would not tempt me again.”

“ Anyhow, my poor child, you know no good would come of telling him where you are, and you, who are a good girl, know it would be wrong to see him after what he said to you.”

“ I w—will not see him for s—some time,” sobbed Alice, “ but to th—think of never seeing him again is too dreadful. I should die. What will become of him ? Do you think I w—want to do anything w—wicked ? ”

“ There, there, girlie,” said Eileen soothingly,

“Of course you don’t. But, at least, promise me that you will not write to him yet awhile.”

“You are very hard, Eileen,” said the girl piteously. “What if he should do something reckless?”

“The only thing that he will do will be to try and find you, I am afraid,” replied the elder quietly.

“So he will,” said Alice, brightening. “He is very determined and brave.”

“Well, we will wait until he does, and shows he is sorry for his er—wickedness before we do anything. My dear child,” went on Eileen, “don’t you know I only want to save you from harm? Thank God you came to me. I know you would be the last to sin deliberately, but we women are all so weak with the men we love.”

She spoke steadily, but her eyes had an expression of anguish.

“I only wanted to write to him,” said Alice. “I came partly to get away from him, because I felt what you say.”

“The only way to do what is right,” continued her sister, “is to continue to fly temptation altogether. And oh, my dear, the penalty of falling is more than some can bear.”

Her voice shook.

Alice looked at her, and impulsively threw her arms round her sister’s neck.

“How good you are!” she cried, “and how kind! I *will* try to do what you wish, but you must help me, dear.”

Eileen quickly regained her composure, and said more cheerfully,

“ Now, dear, we must talk about practical things. Have you any plans, or any money of your own ? ”

“ No—o,” answered Alice. “ I have only a few pounds.” Then, with a burst of grief, “ I don’t *want* to plan, or to live, if I may never see him again ! ”

“ Nonsense, dearie,” said Eileen quietly. “ You mustn’t be a baby. Now, how would you like to be a nurse here for a few months ? ”

“ I will be anything you like, dear,” Alice answered in a small voice.

“ Would you be brave enough to live with lunatics all day, do you think ? ”

“ Oh, yes,” said Alice apathetically. “ I don’t mind what I do.”

Eileen sighed at this indifference.

“ You could try to forget your own trouble in helping these poor creatures,” she said gently.

“ So I will, if I can, but I am not good like you. I am frivolous and silly, at least I was.”

“ Nonsense, dear,” said Eileen. “ You are a good gentle-hearted girl.”

“ I know *you* have done what you advise me,” said Alice, “ but I cannot feel any desire to help anybody. I am too selfish ! ”

“ Kiddie,” said Eileen hesitatingly. “ Do you remember what mother used to read to us ? Perhaps you don’t—you were too young. It was about a Man who comforted the weary, and healed the sick while awaiting His own death.”

“ May He help me,” whispered Alice, “ and I will do my best.”

Eileen's face was pale and drawn.

"I will run now, and get you a cup of tea after your journey," she said hurriedly.

She went into her own room, and shut the door quietly. Then she flung herself on her knees in a passion of long restrained tears.

"Oh, you hypocrite!" she groaned. "*You!* to preach sacred truths to that innocent child! *You,* an abandoned woman! Oh, the mockery! It will scorch your soul, that child's love and trust in you!"

She raised her hands to heaven.

"Oh, God," she said, "I do not ask forgiveness, but save my little sister from my sin. Look not to me, but on her, and answer this prayer for her sake, and Thy mercy." The woman sobbed despairingly on her knees.

Who shall say that this prayer of an erring heart went unheard?

Presently Eileen dried her tears hurriedly, and bathed her eyes. Then she went downstairs, had some tea prepared for Alice, and with a pale but calm face returned to her sister.

"Is this house yours, dear?" asked Alice, as she sipped the eternal feminine poison.

"Oh, no," was the quiet reply. "It is Dr. Smith's. I keep house for him now."

"You never told me in your letters," said Alice reproachfully.

"Didn't I? Well, I suppose I did not think it important, besides, I did not want to worry you.

You see I got a bad ankle from the continual standing and walking involved in the nursing, and Dr. Smith thought it wise to give it up, so recently I have been resting in this way."

"It was very kind of him," said Alice warmly. "I shall like him for that."

"Now, dear, wouldn't you like to tidy yourself before he comes in? You must make a favourable impression, you know, in order to be appointed as a nurse!"

Alice smiled sadly, but though she looked perfectly charming she went gratefully with her sister to accomplish this, to ladies' minds, ever necessary operation.

It will be seen that Eileen had resolved to keep her sister under her protection, even at the risk of Alice discovering her own unhappy secret.

CHAPTER X

ON the morning of his second day in the asylum, John sat down to breakfast, after his rather peculiar night, with a feeling of the utter unreality of yesterday's events. But there was Alice's letter, and here was unmistakably asylum food—bread made from inferior flour, and 'contract' bacon, eggs, marmalade and coffee. The fetish of economy was again in evidence. But novelty adds her own relish, and John made a good breakfast.

Then he took the opportunity to unpack another box. This contained his treasures—a hand-painting of his mother, his school cricket-bat, a rack of time-tested pipes, framed photographs of school and hospital cricket and football teams, a tiger-skin and head that had fallen to his gun in the Malay States, an antique clock, two ivory idols, and last, but not least, an old snap-shot of Alice, the only portrait of her he possessed.

Having disposed of these to his satisfaction, he went down to see Dr. Smith. He knocked at the office door, and was bidden 'come in.' Smith was looking over yesterday's reports written by the attendants in charge of the wards.

"Good morning, sir," began John, "I thought I ought to mention a few other things I came across last night, and tell you how I dealt with them."

"Certainly, Dr. Fownes," replied Smith rather coldly.

Then John told him of the man without a bed, the one dying from sulphonal poisoning, and the acute abdominal case.

"I gave Lowton his bed," he said, "but could do nothing for the other two. What would you suggest?"

"Well, if you like to try Lowton with a bed, I have no objection," said Smith. "But don't you worry about the others. They are both hopeless chronic lunatics. What would be the good of operating on Manning? He might die after, and then there would be an inquest, for you can't do big operations quietly, or he might tear off the dressings of his wound, and then we should have to restrain him, and enter the facts in the register. Now we don't want either. And when all's said and done, he's far better dead. Let him take his chance.

"There won't be any trouble over the sulphonal case. We'll certify his death as due to cerebral oedema, or something. Between you and me, he was a devil, a smasher and very violent, and will be a deuced good riddance. All the same, it might not have happened if I had not been so hard pushed by being single-handed."

Smith spoke quite carelessly, and John, whose sensibilities had not yet been blunted by asylum life, did not like it. On the other hand, the ideas of allowing folk to die, and hushing up accidental poisonings astonished him so much that he really

could not feel strongly about them. Then Dr. Smith took them so as a matter of course. Nevertheless, these things were repugnant to John's feelings as a doctor, for, being young, he had a high idea of his calling. The ethical aspect we will not trouble the reader with, he may decide it for himself. Should lunatics who are regarded by competent (save us!) observers as hopeless, be allowed to die like dogs for want of proper medical attention?

Nor, to tell the truth, did John bother much about this side of the question.

The other point about the legitimacy or not of concealing the true cause of death we will leave Dr. Smith to discuss. Only saying here that to certify poisoning as brain-disease is about as accurate as the majority of certifications in asylums, where the post-mortem examinations are made for the most part by persons almost entirely ignorant of pathology, not to mention cases of wilful blindness on the part of the examiner. For example, what is easier than to miss seeing some fractured ribs in a case where their discovery means an inquest and all sorts of unnecessarily searching enquiries? It is true these enquiries usually elicit nothing in such cases that do come to light; the unanimity of everybody concerned in swearing their ignorance of the "accident" is touching; but inquests, however absurd, are disliked greatly in asylums.

"I should like to have made some attempt at saving Manning's life," said John, after a pause.

Smith shrugged his shoulders.

“ Well, well,” he said, “ It is too late now. He will be moribund.”

“ Then you must pardon me, sir, but I don't like the other business—I mean the sulphonal case,” and John looked full at Smith.

“ My dear Fownes,” rejoined the superintendent, “ the other business is not *your* business. You didn't poison him, and you don't sign his death certificate. Besides, my dear sir, what's the good of making trouble? The thing's done, and can't be undone. Now let us leave that,” he went on. “ I see by the night report that you incised Mullin's jaw. Now I have had twenty years experience of lunatics, and I find these things always do as well if left alone, and if one doesn't waste dressings on them. You know lunatics are not like sane patients.”

“ But the poor devil was howling with pain !” remonstrated John.

“ Nonsense !” replied Smith. “ He howls at nothing.”

John could say no more. He was Smith's subordinate officer, and then he knew little about the insane. But these incidents rankled.

Then he casually mentioned what he had overheard the chief night attendant say to the patient Mullin, thinking it comparatively a small matter.

But Dr. Smith immediately ignited himself, jumped up, swore, and rang for the attendant. But John never heard that any punishment was meted out to the man.

John went up again to his room, put his stethoscope and clinical thermometer into his pocket, and started off on his "round."

Hoping to see Alice, he began upon the female side of the asylum, and, sad to relate, gave but little thought to his patients. But he glanced eagerly at every nurse he encountered, and the poor girls wondered in their little hearts what could be wrong with them to make the handsome new doctor look away with such disappointment in his eyes! Needless to say, he was the talk of the nurses' mess that day, and if his ears did not tingle, it was because they were tuned only to respond to the voice of his sweetheart.

His scrutiny of the nurses, however, was not entirely devoid of result. His trained eye observed and was arrested by the rather peculiar fit of the uniform of one of them.

"That nurse's uniform is a bad cut," he remarked to the matron who accompanied him on his round.

She glanced sharply at him.

"Yes, it is," she agreed after a pause, "she's a new-comer and is wearing a stock uniform until her own is made."

Then a patient claimed John's attention and the incident passed from his mind.

He was destined to be disappointed that morning, for Alice was out with a walking-party of patients. In the middle of his tour of inspection round the male side, a new case arrived, and he was called down to the admission room. Here he found Dr.

Smith reading the certificates. The latter relinquished these to John, saying merely,

“Examine her in the ward, and write down her injuries on this,” handing him a printed paper.

“And I shan’t mind, my love, at all,” broke in the patient. “Give us a kiss,” and she attempted to throw her arms round John’s neck. He stepped back with a ludicrous face of disgust, and she was pulled away by the nurse who had come to take her to the ward.

Going there, the patient contrived to tear a nurse’s cap and smash a window. When John reached the ward some few minutes later, he found the patient being held down in bed by four nurses. She was a handsome well-built girl of twenty-eight, and gave the nurses as much trouble as they needed.

“Why don’t you be quiet?” said John sternly.

“I will,” replied the patient, “I’ll be a lamb if you’ll kiss me.”

“Don’t be silly,” said John.

“Well,” said she, “shake hands then, old chap.”

“Certainly,” replied John, giving her his hand. She kissed it, smiled shyly, and became as limp as wool.

He examined her without further trouble, and noted down some minor injuries.

“Shall we put her in the padded-room?” said the matron.

“Why?” asked John in a wondering voice.

“Well, she broke a window,” replied the matron tartly.

“Oh, ah—so she did. Well do as you think best.”

“No! I won't go into the padded-room,” declared the patient beginning to struggle violently.

“You should have behaved yourself, my lady,” said the nurse whose cap had been torn.

“Don't let me be put there!” implored the girl of John.

“Will you be quiet and good, then?”

“Yes, I will! I'll promise *you* I will.”

“All right,” said John. “Let her stay here.”

The matron and nurses scowled, and then tossed their heads with contempt, as one would say, ‘Here's a soft fool!’

John took no notice, but began to question the patient. Her history briefly was this—

She had been brought up strictly in an old-fashioned dissenting family. She was an only child, and had never enjoyed much intercourse with other young folks. Dances, entertainments, music, and all joviality had been prohibited. She had hardly exchanged ten words with a man outside a chapel. Naturally she did not become acquainted with anyone suitable for a husband, nor yet to ask her.

Now this girl was born for love and marriage, but for years these, her chief instincts, had been suppressed. So much John elicited, and deduced.

“A common enough history,” remarks a reader, “but not so much as formerly. Children are brought up more liberally nowadays, as a rule. An education like hers is enough to drive anybody mad.”

Yet, my friend, such adolescent insanities are more common to-day than ever.

Why ?

Because we don't marry young enough. We are too anxious to make a position before we men marry. And to some natures, ay, more as time advances, especially among women, early marriage is imperative, or—

But this is a digression, pardon it, reader, and be grateful it is no longer, for I could have gone on for pages !

John found nothing abnormal now in this girl's conversation, but her conduct was undoubtedly insane. He resolved to buy a text-book on insanity, and read it carefully.

However, he soon forgot about this girl, and all the rest of the patients when he had finished his round, and devoted his mind to forming some plan to meet Alice. Whether she would try to avoid a tête-à-tête with him indefinitely he did not know; but he was determined she should not succeed. He decided to play the spy that afternoon, and the next, and if she did not go out he would march straight to her sister and demand to see his sweetheart.

In pursuance of this project he planted himself on a chair under one of the trees in the grounds, whence he commanded a view of the door used by the female staff. He had discovered this after his round, by observing several nurses emerge therefrom. Being shaded by the branches of his tree, his position was not at all conspicuous. Here he smoked, and affected to read a newspaper.

A few nurses dressed in the cheap finery affected

by their class—for the reader must know that asylum nurses are not of the lofty station that, I am given to understand, hospital nurses are—came out for their half-day holiday, on pleasure bent. These met their favourite attendants halfway down the drive, and they went off in couples. It is one of the recognised things in asylums for each nurse to 'walk out' with an attendant. Their actual choice is often made for them by the circumstance that their holidays fall on the same day! And quaintly enough, marriage frequently follows this 'walking out.' Unfortunately other less satisfactory results are even more common.

The afternoon wore away, and John, disappointed but undaunted, went in and had his tea. Then he watched from his window until six, when he did his second round of inspection. After this, dinner, and more watching, again to result in nothing.

When Fownes saw Dr. Smith after his six o'clock round he found the latter re-reading the lunacy commissioners' last report on his asylum.

He handed it to Fownes.

"See," he said with satisfaction, "what a glowing account we got this year."

John read a marked passage—"The patients for the most part appeared very contented, and were unusually quiet. What few complaints they preferred proved upon investigation to be groundless. Their dress and that of the staff struck us as being particularly neat and uniform——"

"By the way," said John, "one of the nurse's

uniforms I saw to-day was anything but neat. It was about three sizes too big."

"Oh, confound it! There's too many of them," exclaimed Smith angrily.

"What, nurses or uniforms?"

"Eh? Oh, never mind, I was thinking of something else. A badly-fitting uniform, did you say? I must see the dressmaker about it. What's the girl's name?"

"I don't know," replied John, "but the matron will; I pointed it out to her. She said the nurse was a probationer whose own uniform was not made yet."

The superintendent laughed.

"All right," he said, "Now listen to this as a contrast. He read aloud an extract from another asylum report. "'We found the patients rather noisy, and not so tidily dressed as we could wish. Several complained of having medicine forced upon them, which proved to be cod-liver oil emulsion and Dr.— informed us that it was necessary for their health—' But, note Fownes, the commissioners don't like it. Fools! all three of them—, the patients for grumbling, the commissioners for doing what amounts to the same thing, the superintendent for wasting the stuff on them. And that's from the report of an asylum with one of the highest maintenance rates in the kingdom! Listen to this too—'Inquests were held upon five patients—' We never had one.—'There were four cases of fracture of bones—'—None here!—'Three escapes occurred since our last visit—'—Ditto. And so on

all down the line, and at 13s. 6d. per head per week, sir! Thank your stars, Fownes, that you are in a better administered asylum."

But was Rudford better administered? Perhaps in some respects. It depends upon what meaning is attached to the word administration. If it is synonymous with relative starvation, neglect, concealment——. From even his short experience Fownes was inclined to be sceptical.

CHAPTER XI

JOHN was so impatient the next morning for a sight of Alice, and went about his medical work in so perfunctory a manner that his round was hardly of more value than Dr. Smith's.

But he noticed that the nurse of the ill-fitting uniform was nowhere visible. Nor did he ever see her again.

The afternoon, rewarded his patience, if such a misnomer may be pardoned. Shortly after he had installed himself under his tree Alice came out in a plain grey dress; yet to John she seemed to light up the whole path. He let her pass, which she did without observing him, and watched her go out into the main road. Then he rushed indoors, got his hat, and followed her in as leisurely a fashion as he could achieve.

She walked a few hundred yards along the road, and then climbed over a stile into a field to gain a footpath leading through some pretty woods into the town. She entered the woods without looking back, and John followed, gazing at her in rapture. Lightly she swung along, her lithe trim figure moving rhythmically with her stride. At times she momentarily increased her pace, and little snatches of song broke from her lips. The autumn sun filtering through the golden leaves turned the waves of her hair into their own colour. Now and then John caught a glimpse of a round pink

cheek, as she turned her head to admire a bunch of blackberries or holly. A robin hopped on to a twig near her, and said "Sweet!" John caught a little gurgle of laughter, and then——

"—My heart is singing. He is coming home to-day."

He quickened his pace, and trod on a dead stick, which snapped loudly. She started and turned round. A look of beatitude lighted her face as she came towards him with shining eyes, and outstretched hands. Her lips were parted in a smile whose sweetness was in no wise marred by their quivering. John ached to crush her in his arms. Instead, he seized her hands, and kissed them tenderly, and held them and stood drinking in her every feature with greedy eyes. Then her own sweet eyes fell, veiling the light of heaven from him, but a lovely blush in part compensated for this, and two tears of sheer happiness escaped from under her downcast lids. And every worry, pain, and trouble left him, and his heart sang.

Then they walked on, hand in hand, into the sunlight, saying nothing, but exchanging hearts at every step. Time had gone back. They were boy and girl again, free to love and live for each other.

They reached the town, and looked with childish delight into the shoddy shop-windows, windows transfigured to her because he saw them with her, and to him for like reason. She showed him the ancient parish church, and pointed out its beauties, neither did it provoke unpleasant stirring of memory. But he would look at her rather than

Norman arches, and her lips rebuked, though her eyes caressed him.

They had tea together in a charming old inn parlour, with the now sinking sun glancing through the latticed windows, gilding the old brass upon the sideboard, and glorifying Alice's hair so that it vied with the brilliance of her eyes.

And they dreamed on, as if by one consent, snatching this blessed afternoon from out the past. They did not speak much, and then only trivialities, but their eyes met continually, and held each other, and their hands touched sometimes and spoke volumes.

Then they went out again, and John paid the landlady five shillings, without any idea of what they had had for tea, so that Alice took him to task for his extravagance; because that somehow implied her interest in his purse, his heart beat rapturously.

They wandered blissfully back until the asylum came in sight.

Then John awoke. Recollection and reality would no longer be denied, but surged back in a cold flood.

"You *cannot* go away!" he burst forth.

"Oh, hush, hush!" entreated Alice. "Do not spoil this, our day."

But man is not blessed with this woman's faculty of living indefinitely in the present.

He caught her hands again.

"Alice," he said urgently. "Promise me——"

"Don't let us talk about that now—dear," she

coaxed. "I will see you to-morrow after I am off duty."

"And beastly duty it is for you," grumbled John, mollified by this promise.

She put her finger on his lips.

When they entered the asylum drive, in the shade of a sycamore, John paused and bent over his sweetheart.

"May I, dear," he murmured, "say 'good-bye' here?"

Her blue eyes filled, but she looked up at him with gentle reproach, through which beamed so innocent a love that he bowed his head in token of submission. So they parted. Alice went up the drive alone, turning now and then to cast such sweet glances of affection at John, kicking his heels on a fence, that he was consoled for the loss of his kiss.

He watched her enter the female staff door, then got down and went from paradise to the other place, i.e., the asylum.

He was determined to move heaven and earth to keep Alice near him, and the only way to do that was, in some manner, to placate her sister.

So he wrote to her, asking the favour of an interview, when and where she liked, provided only it were soon.

Then he did his six o'clock round. During this he unearthed a rather advanced case of consumption. This individual he found continually coughing in a ward full of quiet patients, and, moreover, sleeping in a crowded dormitory, and duly disseminating his disease. John did all he could,

namely, arrange for the man to sleep in a single-room. Even that was a matter of considerable difficulty, as these charming apartments were all occupied at night. However, he made an exchange between the pthisic and a maniac.

Then he found a recently admitted patient, an excited maniac, who in the morning had been running round his single-room gesticulating and shouting, in a state of collapse. The man lay quiet and still, with shallow jerky respiration, and a cold sweat on his forehead.

Fownes grew slightly pale, and hastily administered stimulants. His first question to the attendant in charge concerned sedatives. But it appeared that the patient had been given little of that nature as his heart was considered weak. In fact, John remembered that he had heard a cardiac murmur. To his other questions he obtained only indefinite answers.

None of the attendants apparently could give him further information than that the patient had become worse during the last hour.

John examined the man gingerly, fearing that any undue disturbance might prove fatal. He again investigated the state of the patient's heart, but that organ did not appear responsible for his condition. However, he was a stout, flabby individual, and this rendered the diagnosis of internal lesions rather difficult.

The doctor's remedial measures produced no effect. The patient lay on his back, livid and gasping. John watched him anxiously. Suddenly

the poor wretch began to cough in a peculiar gurgling fashion, then lay still.

John felt his pulse, and with a shock realised that life was extinct.

He was considerably upset, the more so because the illness was so sudden and unusual.

He went hurriedly to find Dr. Smith. He started when he saw the superintendent, and for the moment forgot his errand. The man was transformed. He was pale, drawn and shaking—the picture of abject misery.

John stared at him in astonishment.

“Excuse me, sir,” said he bluntly. “You are ill. Can I do anything?”

“No, no,” answered Smith wearily. “Never mind me. I have a bad headache. It will be better soon. What do you want?”

“Won’t you have an analgesic of some sort?” asked John.

“No, thanks, I shall be all right. What have you to tell me?”

Then John related the patient’s symptoms and death.

“Did you examine his chest?” asked Dr. Smith.

“I listened to his heart, but did not dare disturb him. I thought I heard a few pleural creps.”

The other looked relieved.

“Ah,” said he indifferently. “I am not surprised he died suddenly. He had heart disease.”

“His heart was not enlarged or dilated, sir,” said John quietly. “Nor did the case look like a cardiac one.”

"No? Well, they're not always easy to diagnose. It's a clear case of death from heart failure nevertheless."

"The post-mortem examination will be interesting," observed John.

"I don't think one necessary," said Smith. "The case is clear to my mind."

"I thought you always did P.M.s," said John in surprise, and, moreover, particularly anxious to do this one as extra interesting.

Smith glanced sharply at him, then eyed his desk as before. He appeared nonplussed and was silent for a moment. Then he said slowly.

"Yes—as a rule. Perhaps you are right—it would be interesting. I'll lend you a hand, we'll do it to-night together, at about half-past seven."

Then John told him about the consumptive, and asked what more he could do.

"No, there were no balconies or other accommodation for open-air treatment. If John really wished it, he could order the man a couple of pints of milk a day, but if they did that in all cases of tubercle in the wards the maintenance rate would soon go up, and that must not occur on any condition. If John felt a sense of duty which made him wish to tinker with these cases, he'd better not look for them. There were plenty in the wards. It was no good trying to patch them up, they were bound to die. No, tuberculin was too expensive to bother with. Indeed, he was thankful that there was such a thing as phthisis, or the place would always be overcrowded. That and colitis were the

only things that thinned them out a bit." Thus Dr. Smith.

John could say no more. He went away with a growing depression in his mind.

He waited until eight o'clock for Dr. Smith to come over for the post-mortem examination. Then, as the superintendent did not put in an appearance, John sent a message over to remind him. The reply came back in a handwriting that John rightly surmised to be Mrs. Dennis's. It said that Dr. Smith was not well enough to come; did Dr. Fownes really need his help?

"Poor devil," thought John. "I'll do it myself. He won't want to be bothered. It must be a damn bad headache. Migraine, I expect, and he'll have a day or two of it."

He sent for the head male attendant, and presently that gentleman brought his stately form and empty head into John's room.

"Has James Buck's body been taken to the post-mortem room?" said John. "I want to do a post-mortem on him to-night. Will you tell the attendant who helps, please."

"Dr. Smith gave orders that he would not be needed, sir. He has, therefore, gone h'off duty."

"Oh. Very well. I'll manage myself."

"Very good, sir."

John took a lantern and went across to the post-mortem room, which stood some fifty yards away.

He unlocked the door and went in. The chilly damp air and heavy charnel-house smell of the place impinged almost like a solid body against him as he

entered. He lit the gas—a feeble flame—and placed his lantern so that its beams illuminated the white still figure on the table. Taking off his coat he rolled up his shirt-sleeves and donned an overall.

Then he began his dissection. First he removed with the aid of a saw and chisel, the skull cap, and took out the brain. This he dissected carefully. Nothing abnormal was present there. Next he made a long incision down the front of the body. Putting his left hand on the chest to steady the corpse for this he felt a peculiar grating sensation. He stopped, startled.

Then he felt the chest again and ran his hand over the ribs. He nodded grimly. With a feeling of cold expectancy at his heart he cleared the ribs on both sides.

He paled and stood quite still, breathing quickly.

Seven lower ribs were broken, five on one side, two on the other.

Ah! reader, perhaps you do not realise the significance of this—this old story of quiet murder. Pilloried by Charles Reade and others years ago, it still rears its head.

Undiagnosed, ignored, deliberately concealed, or dubbed “accident,” this perennial asylum crime occurs sporadically amongst us to this day. And so it will continue to do while these unhappy places remain understaffed, under-doctored, while economy is placed before men’s lives, while asylum work remains the refuge of the untrained, unfit and unprincipled.

In this enlightened age Englishmen do not kill

their mentally-afflicted brethren by burning at the stake, drowning or other summary means. But the spirit is the same. "Throw them somewhere out of sight, out of mischief, anywhere where they will not be *systematically* ill-used." That is all we, as a nation, ask for.

"But asylums are inspected," protests a reader.

A fig for *any* inspection, let alone a cursory annual visit, which in many cases is known to be imminent. What we need is proper men and women, and a proper number of them, ay—and with a proper spirit, to manage our asylums.

How to obtain them?

Money!

Pay good wages and you get good men. Make the life for the doctors and the staff more human, and they will be so. A maintenance of under fifteen shillings should be a disgrace to any institution for the treatment of the insane. Nor is that sum sufficient.

Forgive this digression, O careless reader of novels for amusement—but do not forget it.

John Fownes preoccupied and unhappy, proceeded with his examination. He found both pleural cavities half full of blood.

He went no further, but sewed up the body and returned to his room. He did not question how this had come about. He was benumbed, and sat lost in thought for a while. Then he drew Alice's letter from his pocket and read it again. By degrees he became more his old careless self. His thoughts

returned to his own position and his personal interests ; the tragedy was gradually relegated to the background, and his own affairs reclaimed his attention almost entirely.

So shall it be with my reader ?

John spent the rest of the evening writing to his mother and Dr. Rogers. The next morning he received a note from Mrs. Dennis.

“ Dear Dr. Fownes,” (it ran),

“ I shall be at home this afternoon between three and four. Will you come over then ?

Yours sincerely,

“ E. DENNIS.”

The morning dragged slowly away for John. An uneventful round was only brightened by the sight of Alice in her smart nurse's costume. She looked charming, and blushed divinely, but quickly turned away after a swift glance at John, to busy herself re-making an already immaculate bed. He managed by a great effort of will to keep his eyes off her, and listened, with a smile to the matron's chatter. For that good lady—a typical product of asylum life, hard, forgetful and sensual—had made up her mind, after their little breeze of yesterday, that the better way to gain her own ends with the new doctor would be to fascinate him. Her efforts in this direction caused some secret amusement, both amongst the staff and in John's mind.

Dr. Smith, he found without surprise, had not come over to the asylum that morning.

CHAPTER XI

THE morning passed at length. John presented himself punctually at three at the superintendent's door. The housemaid opened it, and conducted him straight into the drawing-room, where sat Mrs. Dennis, looking not a little pale and aloof. She received him rather coldly.

"What did you wish to see me about, Dr. Fownes?" she asked guardedly.

"I had a letter from Alice," said John, coming characteristically to the point at once. "She tells me that you know all about us, and she writes various hard things. Now why do you make her insist upon leaving here so soon? I know it is you. Why are you against me?"

But he saw, with astonishment and anger, that Mrs. Dennis was scarcely listening to him. She appeared to be straining her ears to catch some extraneous sound.

"Madam," said John resentfully, "can you not listen to me on such an important matter?"

"I am so sorry," she replied, recalling her wandering attention. "Forgive me, I am very worried." Indeed, she began to look frightened.

"So am I," said he. "Why should you part us? You know I have promised not to—to suggest any wrong to Alice."

"What is your hope?" she asked gravely.

“ How can anything good come of your intercourse with my sister ? Indeed, you can do nothing but harm, and it does not become you as—— ” she checked herself “ —to wish her to stay here.”

John bit his lip.

“ Where is she going ? ” he asked, after a pause.

“ To her old nurse, if possible.”

“ But won't you give me a week longer ? ” pleaded John. “ Let us at least get used to the idea of parting. Why, I wouldn't do her any harm for worlds ! How can you think it ? ”

Mrs. Dennis's face softened slightly.

“ Will you give me your solemn prom—— ”

Crash !

They both started up ; the woman with a cry ; then she rushed from the room. John heard her hurry upstairs. Then a wailing voice broke upon his ear :

“ Let me out, Eileen. Let me out.”

Then recklessly :

“ I *will* get out ! ”

Another crash.

John stood dumbfounded, for he recognised Dr. Smith's voice.

“ What the devil ! ” he exclaimed. “ Is he a prisoner in his own house ? ” Then he caught the unlocking of a door, hasty but low voices ; then again silence.

Ten minutes elapsed. John, true to his character for tenacity, lit a cigarette and waited. Twenty minutes passed, and still there was no sound. He lit a second cigarette, and began pacing the room.

When he had smoked it half through, Mrs. Dennis came down again. She was flushed, but haggard, and sank exhausted into a chair.

“ I am so sorry, Dr. Fownes,” she gasped, “ I forgot all about you.”

“ What in the name of all the devils is wrong ? ” demanded John.

“ Oh ! do not ask me,” was the despairing reply.

“ But, confound it all, I heard Smith’s voice ! ”

“ Yes, yes. He is not well, but I had no idea he would get bad so quickly, or indeed so bad at all, when I told you to come to-day.”

“ Why is he locked in a room ? ” he insisted.

The woman burst into tears.

“ Come,” said John, more quietly, “ tell me. You know you can trust me, and I may be able to help.”

She continued crying, and made no reply.

“ Eileen,” said he gently, “ you must confide in me. Remember, my dearest wish and aim is to become your brother.”

She looked up at him doubtfully, but the longing to have someone to lean upon, someone strong, overcame her desire for concealment, and she said, impulsively :

“ I will tell you ! I know your trouble, and you shall know mine. Let us help each other if we can.”

Then she added, in a low voice :

“ Dr. Fownes, do you know what dipsomania is ? ”

John gasped.

"Why, I know it is a sort of periodical drunkenness," he said in the same tone.

"More than that. It is a form of epilepsy. Every month or so he gets a frightful depression for a few days, and that drives him to drink. Then he is wild for a time. Oh, it is dreadful—I cannot describe it! Then, afterwards, he repents, and swears never to touch a drop again."

"Poor devil!" said John in an awed voice. "How awful it must be for you, too. Do you know, I noticed he looked horribly miserable and haggard yesterday. He said he had a headache. You shut him up to prevent him getting drink?"

"Yes," she whispered. "It was arranged between us last time. We have succeeded in hiding it up till now, but, oh, John, if you knew what a relief it is to tell you about it!"

John pressed her hand.

"Is he locked up still?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied, "I managed to soothe him, but God knows how it will end!"

"Can't you give him something to stop his craving?"

"He won't take anything when he reaches that stage."

"How long will he be like this, then?"

"Oh, I cannot tell," she moaned; "he has always had access to alcohol before. But when you came we thought he ought to try to do without it."

"Is he dangerous?"

"I do not know," she said helplessly. "He may be if he is thwarted."

"I shall stay here until he gets better," said John simply.

She looked at him gratefully, and tried to murmur some thanks, but the relief of having someone to help her, after months, nay, years, of unaided struggle, choked her. Try to picture Eileen's lot. Every month or so this fearful thing came upon Smith, and no sooner was one attack over than another loomed up on her horizon. She had tried everything, and, indeed, he had planned with her to defeat his inexorable enemy. Finally, in desperation, they determined that next time he should bear his misery, and have no drink.

John and Eileen sat in silence a while. His thoughts returned to Alice, but he could not press his wishes just now upon Eileen, for he knew she felt under an obligation to him.

She sat straining her ears, and looking at John. She went out into the hall; John followed. Dr. Smith's hurried footfalls as he paced the room, fighting his demon, made John shiver.

Presently they heard him groan, then swear loudly, and Eileen started to run upstairs. But before she had ascended half-way, there was a frightful splitting crash, followed by a yell of triumph, and Smith, unclothed, but for shirt and trousers, raced down the stairs.

"Out of the way!" he shrieked, "I *will* have it!"

Brushing Eileen aside, he dashed head foremost into John, and bowled him over like a skittle. Into the dining-room he flew, and seizing a decanter of whiskey, inverted it over his mouth.

John picked himself up, and went into the room.

"For God's sake, sir," he implored, "don't do it!" and he caught hold of the decanter. But Smith wrenched it free, and drank madly. In thirty seconds he had drunk half a pint.

Eileen appeared at the door, as white as death.

"Ha!" shouted Smith, banging the empty decanter on the table. "So here you are; I have caught you finely now! Here is your lover with you, eh? When I am locked in a room." And he glared at Eileen.

John was stupefied.

"Oh, oh, Leonard, how can you talk so?" she pleaded desperately. "You know I am true, and love you more than all the world!" She held out appealing hands to the frenzied man.

"Perhaps, perhaps, but he, he comes to tempt you!"

Then, becoming apparently deadly calm, Smith said, through his teeth:

"Well, he shall fight for you."

John stepped back, and, it must be confessed, was afraid. He had no stomach to fight a madman. But he put a good face on it.

"Nonsense!" he said, sternly, "you don't know what you are saying, sir."

"You shall fight," repeated Smith, "or I will brain her before your eyes, and neither of us shall have her."

Eileen approached him, but he brandished the heavy decanter and shouted:

"Back, woman, or I strike!"

John pulled her back, and, simultaneously, with a snarl, Smith sprang at him. The decanter descended with a crack on John's right wrist, and he dropped his arm with a groan. Smith's left fist struck his cheek, and knocked him backwards. But this was a sort of blow with which he was familiar—a boxer's blow. He gathered himself up, and as Smith again rushed, countered smartly with his left, and laid Smith's cheek open. But he was horribly frightened, and wondered desperately how it would end. The madman again came on, and beating aside John's only serviceable arm with the decanter, dashed his left fist again at his face, but John ducked to the right, and freeing his arm, got home heavily on Smith's jaw. Snap! went his teeth, and blood spurted from his bitten tongue. The next moment John was stretched, quivering and unconscious, on the floor. Smith had hurled the heavy cut glass decanter, which struck John full on the forehead. And there Smith would probably have killed him, had not Eileen, having rushed out for help at the beginning of the fight, returned with unexpected aid. A large, heavy, fair man dashed in, and seizing the superintendent from behind, held him as helpless as a child. This new succour was the chaplain, a simple giant of six feet four, and sixteen stone.

Eileen ran to John, with a horrified cry, and took his head on her lap. She bathed his cut face and head, and presently he recovered consciousness, to see Smith, with a perfectly dazed expression, sitting quietly in a chair.

“ Oh, my God ! ” whispered the superintendent. “ What has happened ? ” and he put his hand to his head.

He looked vaguely round, horror growing in his eyes, then suddenly burst into violent weeping and fled from the room. Eileen followed, in happier tears, for the bout was over.

The chaplain helped John into a chair, and gave him some wine off the sideboard. Then he sat down himself, and eyed John with an air of commiseration.

“ A near thing,” remarked the doctor. “ The beggar nearly finished me. I expect I owe you some thanks, sir ? ”

The other blushed like a schoolgirl.

“ I—I am thankful to say,” he stammered nervously, “ Mrs. Dennis met me just in t—time.”

“ You are the chaplain ? ” said John, holding out his uninjured left hand cordially. “ My name is Fownes ; I am the new A.M.O., you know. It sounds paltry to thank a man for saving one’s life, but I am your friend, and I mean it,” he concluded, with enthusiasm.

“ Th—thank you very m—much,” was the reply, but John’s hand was grasped with a grip that made him wince.

“ Crippled the other side,” explained John. “ Bone gone, I’m afraid. Ever seen Smith like this before ? ” he added.

“ Not so b—bad,” replied the chaplain, “ but I have, I m—mean, I know about his affliction.”

“ I wonder if anything could be done,” mused John.

“ There is only one c—cure,” observed the other gravely.

“ Eh? and what’s that? ” asked John, in surprise.

The chaplain appeared to undergo an inward conflict. He blushed, fidgeted, and cast half-frightened glances to left and right. Then his mouth took a firm line.

“ The help of the Lord,” he said simply.

This was the sort of thing John loathed. Yet the obvious struggle the other had experienced before he could make himself say it, entirely disarmed his resentment, and, indeed, he could not help a certain feeling of admiration mingling with his half-contemptuous surprise.

Before he had time to reply, Eileen re-entered the room.

“ Oh, my dear friends,” she said anxiously, “ how are we going to hush this all up? ”

They stared at each other in silence.

“ Dr. Smith,” ventured John, after a pause, “ had better stay in bed for a few days, and sham illness. I’ll account for my injuries, somehow, as the result of an accident.”

“ Poor John! ” said Eileen softly, apparently just remembering his hurt, such is the sublime indifference of women to the sufferings of all else when the loved one’s welfare is at stake.

“ Oh, I know,” she added suddenly; “ you could saddle a horse, go out the back way into the lane, and then ride in by the front. Everybody will think the horse has thrown you! ”

“ Right oh ! ” said John. “ Where’s the back way out ? ”

“ I will show you, come with me.”

“ Then may I come back for Dr. Smith to dress my wrist ? ” asked John.

“ Oh, you poor boy ! ” she exclaimed penitently. “ Let me see. Oh, John, it is broken ! ”

“ My dear Eileen,” he said gaily, “ it will be as right as a trivet in a few days.”

“ Let me tie it up with my handkerchief. What will Alice say ? ” And with gentle touch she gave it some support thus.

The programme was duly carried out, and with great success. An attendant going out, and a walking party of patients coming in, saw John on his horse, apparently returning badly damaged from a ride. He had possessed the forethought to make his clothes dusty in the back lane. The news spread in that mysterious manner peculiar to small communities. In ten minutes every soul in the asylum knew that the new doctor had sustained an injury while riding, the exact hurt varying from a cut face to a mangled frame !

When John returned to the house to have his wrist attended to, Dr. Smith, still looking much shaken, was profuse in his protestations of sorrow. He sent over to the asylum for splints, and set the broken bone carefully.

In reply to John’s suggestion, he agreed to go to bed for some days, until his cut face had healed.

“ What about your servants, won’t they gossip ? They must have heard the row,” said John.

The other winced.

“ They will not talk,” he said, “ they are paid to keep still tongues.”

It was agreed that John should come over and report to Smith twice a day. John made no mention of the rib case that day to the shaken superintendent.

Before he returned to the asylum, John saw Eileen again for a moment.

“ You surely have not the heart to send Alice away from such a cripple ? ” he said whimsically.

“ I have been thinking it over,” she responded gravely, “ and if you will agree to my terms, she shall stay here for a short time. Indeed, it will be much better so if I can trust you, John.”

“ What are they ? ”

“ That you should only meet in this house. I am sure I can depend on your word. No more waylaying Alice, and solitary walks ! ”

John made a grimace.

“ Why this restriction, then ? ”

“ How do you know who is watching you both ? ” she rejoined. “ You would not have Alice figure in a divorce court, would you ? ”

“ God forbid ! ” he answered. “ But any espionage is extremely unlikely ; that brute Boyne has no idea where she is ; how should he ? ”

“ But he can easily find out where you are. Remember, all he knows is that you both left town more or less at the same time. Now come, give me your promise.”

He acquiesced reluctantly.

“ And what are you going to do with her eventually ? ” he grumbled.

“ I have not definitely decided yet,” she replied, “ but I think we might get her into another asylum when a suitable vacancy occurs. Now, she will be able to wait here until then, since you have agreed to my conditions.”

“ Which asylum ? ” asked John.

“ Now, my dear boy,” said Eileen, “ nothing is settled yet. It is only an idea ; I shall not say another word. You ought to be content, and, indeed, must be, for the present.”

The following morning John reported to Dr. Smith the result of his post-mortem examination of James Buck.

“ I feared so,” said Smith, with an air of sadness, “ from the symptoms you described. The blackguards ! ”

“ Who ? ”

“ Who can tell ? Some attendant or other.”

“ Why, it is murder ! ”

“ Probably not,” replied Dr. Smith ; “ manslaughter. They most likely merely intended to quieten him, but went too far.”

“ How shall I begin to investigate it, sir ? ”

“ Investigate it ? What for ? ”

“ Why, to bring the culprit to justice, of course.”

“ My dear Fownes, believe me, you'd never do it. These cases never come out. Besides, what good would you do ? Now listen to me. This is a beastly thing, admittedly, but it is done. Only ourselves and his assailant know the man's ribs were

broken. If you began enquiries, you would find out nothing—nobody would ‘split,’ even if they knew anything—but you would stir up mud, and there would be an objectionable row, an inquest, and scandal galore. The man would probably have died in any case ; his heart couldn’t have stood the strain of a long bout of excitement. This violence has only hastened his death. It would be mere folly to stir up a futile row over cutting short his life thus by a few days.”

“ But—— ” began John.

“ Now I’ll tell you what we’ll do,” interrupted Smith with decision. “ I shall certify the death as due to heart disease, but to satisfy your hankering after justice, I will, by degrees, find pretexts for dismissing or reducing in seniority the four attendants that might have been concerned in the assault. They thoroughly deserve it for exposing us to the possibility of nasty trouble.”

“ The whole thing is a crying shame, a ghastly business,” said John indignantly, “ and the attendant who did it should be hanged.”

“ Of course,” replied Smith indifferently, “ but I have told you, it is impossible to find him. I *know*. But you are rather too sensitive about these things. When all is said and done, we can’t help it. You are not in any way to blame. I sign the death certificate. Who the devil is to know you ever found any broken ribs ? No one. And I am determined nobody shall. The cause of death is simple enough. Why, even in my notes of the case on admission, I have got down that he had a mitral

murmur, and irregular heart action." (This was true. It was a routine precautionary trick of the superintendent's in excited cases.)

"If you are bent upon this line of conduct, sir," said John, "I can only acquiesce under protest. I would a thousand times rather try to get to the bottom of it."

"No doubt, no doubt, but you must let me know best, Fownes."

And so the incident closed.

In every asylum there is a certain number of patients who are continually writing letters of complaint to persons in authority outside.

Thanks to his r \grave{e} gime, Dr. Smith was troubled by few patients of this class. Not many were bold enough to embark upon this interesting hobby at Rudford. The majority of those who were so fool-hardy, speedily found out that things could be made so uncomfortable for them in a quiet fashion that they preferred to leave those external powers in blissful ignorance. It paid them infinitely better to make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness.

One male patient, however, an epileptic, persisted in airing his grievances with indecent thoroughness. He constantly wrote letters to the Lord Chancellor, the Home Secretary, and the Commissioners in Lunacy. His epistles to the two former dignitaries Dr. Smith regularly burnt. Those to the commissioners he unsealed by the aid of steam, read, and, if interesting, copied them. Then they were re-sealed and posted. It would be unwise to stop

letters to the commissioners, because the patient could ask these gentlemen upon their visit to the asylum for a list of the letters received from him.

These complaints, however, produced no results. The routine was as follows :—

(1) The patient wrote to the commissioners, laying some complaint, and making some charge.

(2) The commissioners wrote to Dr. Smith, asking him for some explanation of the same.

(3) Dr. Smith wrote to the commissioners denying the whole thing.

There the matter ended.

It was the patient's word against the superintendent's. Lunatics do not combine and join forces to produce evidence. Sane people in asylums will ; that is why the latter are never retained in asylums nowadays. But all this writing on the part of the epileptic annoyed Dr. Smith, and was a constant thorn in his side. For you never can be certain that the most inefficient organisation may not sometimes achieve some ends. He had tried the brain paralysing effect of sedatives in his customary doses, but these had failed to paralyse the patient's pen. Short of poisoning him outright, drugs had proved useless.

The patient suffered from frequent and severe fits. Now some people think that dieting exercises a considerable influence over the number of fits an epileptic undergoes, *e.g.*, a vegetarian régime is not infrequently prescribed.

So Dr. Smith hit on the ingenious device of *dieting* this patient, with the idea of diminishing

the exuberance of his pen. He began by stopping the man's meat and halving his allowance of bread. The fits did, in fact, become less frequent, but the patient rebelled. He "gave trouble," tore his clothes, and smashed a window, protesting that he was being starved. The patient was destructive, so his bedclothes were taken away. He slept, therefore, nude, but for a strong canvas shirt. It was winter and cold. The patient pitched into a night-attendant; partly to warm himself, partly to obtain a blanket that the attendant was carrying. He was thus "excited," so his diet was still further modified. He was given beef-tea (asylum variety) instead of bread and margarine for his tea.

The patient became colder.

He caught a chill, developed a pleurisy, was treated and nursed by John, denied aspiration (tapping of the fluid in the chest) by Smith.—Sequel, an empyema, and no more letters to the commissioners or, for that matter, to anyone else.

Very pretty and simple!

But it must not be imagined that Dr. Smith deliberately planned this patient's death. Nor did he foresee it. He was determined to mitigate the nuisance of the man's constant writing, nothing more. If the patient chose to die, well, it was unfortunate for him, that was all.

CHAPTER XIII

AND now, friend the reader, you probably expect to read of thrilling incidents in the conduct of the patients themselves. I am sorry to disappoint you, but incidents of that description do not occur in institutions such as ours at Rudford. They are prevented by drugs, discipline, and starvation, not absolute but relative. Patients the subject of recent insanity, need milk, eggs, meat-juices, etc., etc., in large quantities. But if they obtained these, where would the maintenance rate be? Why, up in the fifteens instead of down in the nine shillings!

A few patients died of consumption. John's efforts to treat them as adequately as the place allowed were politely but firmly thwarted by Dr. Smith.

One or two went out gradually under the drugging system, but John did not appreciate the cause of their deaths. No more were indubitably poisoned like the case he encountered on his first night-round. A few more died from infections such as pneumonia and asylum dysentery (of which more anon) contracted as the result of exposure due to insufficient or absent clothing at night.

Several new patients, were admitted, for the most part to be speedily reduced to the automatic condition of the chronic inmates.

Two or three were discharged "recovered." It

is not to be inferred from the paucity of patients discharged, that sane persons were retained in the asylum. That was not the case. A recovered patient was thankfully discharged; the reason was that very few did recover.

It must be confessed that Dr. Smith used his sedative drugs with a masterly hand. He succeeded in keeping most of those patients who showed a tendency to create "trouble" just sufficiently under the influence of narcotics to render them quiet, inert and wretched, without actually killing them off hand. But not all cases can stand this, hence the gradual declines and deaths. Some died actually from the direct effects of long continued sub-poisoning, others from infections sustained owing to the lowered vitality produced in the same manner.

In short the activities of the patients themselves were limited for the most part to dying.

John bought an up-to-date tome on insanity. More, he read it carefully. And he found out what was necessary to help lunatics, in as many cases as possible, to become sane people. It was not sedative drugs, relative starvation, nor even discipline! Greater knowledge merely served to increase his discontent. It only gave him the satisfaction of knowing what should be done, without being able to do it, for Dr. Smith had the greatest admiration for his own system, and would not consent to any but minor departures from it. Indeed, he became gradually more rigid and less inclined to humour his A.M.O. in these things.

John's experiences in the asylum had made a far

deeper impression on his mind than he knew. At the time of their individual occurrence they were overshadowed by his own personal interests, but the impress remained, and their effect upon his mind and character became more apparent as time went on.

Alice's presence in the asylum and his affection for her pulled him in two directions. He was saved from falling into the lax moral ways of the place, but kept in it a helpless spectator of its abuses. His knowledge of these, apart from the systematic passivity of the superintendent, after all amounted to no more than suspicion, but it was deep harassing suspicion.

Twice a week he enjoyed Alice's company at the superintendent's house for two heavenly hours. Dr. Smith and Eileen were always present at these times, which, in fact, usually took the form of "musical evenings," for both the girls played. Alice sang, and Smith did his share in a rumbling bass.

On the last two or three evenings John had found Alice somehow monopolised by the superintendent more and more, and he himself left to Eileen. This annoyed him, but he felt he could say nothing, without appearing churlish and silly. For they met there as friends, and there was no tacit recognition of any closer intimacy between any of them. John was ignorant of the extent of Dr. Smith's knowledge of his own and Alice's affairs, and he, himself, was supposed to be unaware of the relations between Eileen and the superintendent. Of the

latter Alice was so actually, but she had an idea that her sister was fond of Dr. Smith. It must be remembered that Alice lived like the other nurses, in the asylum. Except occasionally for tea, and for the musical evenings, she scarcely entered the superintendent's house. She disliked Dr. Smith, more especially since the *fracas* in which John sustained his broken wrist, for it had been impossible to keep from her the true facts of the case. Eileen's patience with the superintendent under his affliction had not escaped Alice's notice, and surprise, until she hit partially upon the truth, namely that her sister cherished an affection for him.

When John obtained an opportunity, he spoke to Alice about Smith's attentions. She laughed, told him not to be silly, and assured him that they were equally unwelcome to her. To please him she would try to avoid tête-à-têtes with the superintendent, but that she was sure he was only endeavouring to be polite; possibly he had observed her dislike for him, and wished to remove it.

Alice continued her duties at Rudford asylum undisturbed, and on the whole was happy. The presence of Fownes and her sister protected her from the deteriorating influences of the place, moreover its iniquities were much less overt since Fownes' advent. Her chief thoughts and interests centred around these two whom she loved, rendered her independent of the society of her fellow nurses.

No further mention of her departure was made. Apparently Dr. Smith had not been able to find her a post in a suitable asylum.

The evenings John met her were the only cheerful part of his life. On other nights he would sit at his window and watch wistfully for her to pass.

He played football on Saturdays for the asylum eleven. This he enjoyed at first, but by degrees it became a duty, and to be regarded as part of his work, as indeed it was.

Two afternoons between two and six o'clock each week, he was free to go out. This, too, soon grew into an obligation instead of a pleasure. He went for the sake of his health, but the time at his disposal did not enable him to go far afield. He became utterly sick of the town and its neighbourhood.

He soon found that Dr. Smith knew hardly anyone in Rudford, a visitor at his house was a *rara avis*. Eileen, except for occasional walks with Alice, appeared never to leave the asylum estate. On rare occasions she drove over with Dr. Smith to see some friends living some ten miles away.

John found himself unable to make the acquaintance of the townsfolk, such as they were. None called upon him, and he received no invitations to go out. In fact, the town ignored the asylum, which was exactly what Dr. Smith desired.

Naturally a sociable person, without many resources within himself, John being thus cut off so much from his kind, began to lose his cheerfulness. He grew to hate his lonely rooms and solitary meals. He sickened of reading, and longed for someone to talk to. He began to make remarks to the housemaid, Rose, when she brought in his meals. She understood why exactly, and was conversational

and sympathetic in manner, but always respectful, for John's first lesson had left its impression. Out of sheer kindness of heart she would find little jobs to do in his sitting-room, when he was there ; and he was grateful, and talked to her. At first she would lean against the table as they spoke, or sit on its edge, later she would perch on the arm of a chair : then John told her jokingly to sit down comfortably at least. So at length she would come often of an evening to sit and chat. In addition to her fresh beauty, this girl had a bright intelligent mind, and her society at first was a godsend to John. He felt for her only a grateful sense of comradeship. But not so the girl.

Her feeling for him changed from respect to esteem, and finally the silly girl lost her heart to the handsome doctor. He was so kind and clever, "such a gentleman," and treated her with a frank camaraderie so foreign to anything she had met with in men of her own class. At first she only evinced her affection by a softening of her eyes when she looked at him, by little kind thoughtful acts. Then she took to coming more frequently to chat with him. John wondered rather at this, but did not at all resent it. Had he only guessed the frantic gossip that flew about amongst the staff, he would never have looked the girl in the face again.

During one of her visits he was showing her some Malay photographs in an album, and they were perforce seated side by side, on the sofa. He was pointing out some incident in a print, and looked up to make a remark. He found, instead of looking

at the photograph the girl's eyes were fixed on his face, with an expression of affection there could be no mistaking. He looked at her in amazement and dismay. She blushed scarlet, but did not lower her gaze, it became appealing, and she leant ever so slightly against him. He got up abruptly, with a red face, and his head in a whirl.

"My God," he muttered. "Here's a mess!"

She stood up, too, and approaching him with an air of abandonment, held out her hands.

"No, no, Rose," he said, rather unsteadily, "Don't be a damned fool!"

"I do not care," she said, "I do love you."

"You silly girl! But there, I suppose it's my fault. What's the good? Why I could never—marry you, you know, and I'm not the other sort of cad."

"I shall always love you," said the girl in an unchanged voice.

"Nonsense!" said John, with assumed lightness, "You're hysterical to-night."

"I'm not!" she said indignantly, looking very beautiful in her anger.

"Well, well, run away now, do, there's a good girl."

Then he added with sudden roughness.

"Go, you silly little fool!"

The girl went.

When she brought his breakfast the next morning, she said nothing, but behaved just as before they became friends, except that John could not

help noticing that her hand trembled as she put down his plate. His little household went on as usual, but Rose only appeared in his room when compelled by her duties.

John observed that she lost her pretty colour, and occasionally he saw traces of tears. Her manner to him was gentle and respectful, but she studiously avoided his eye. When by chance she did catch his glance, she coloured violently.

But John sadly missed her society as a companion. The solitude again began to oppress him. The life of monotonous routine, broken only by his visits to Alice, the constant galling restraint from doing his duty to the patients under Dr. Smith's system, and its harassing incidents, the sickness of heart resulting from hope deferred, love starved and suppressed, the continual society of the insane, and isolation from the sane, all told more and more upon John's spirits.

Added to these was a growing jealousy of Dr. Smith, founded upon the pairing that would still often occur upon their social evenings.

Then John began to call himself a fool. He was thwarted on all hands, denied all his desires; he must find some happiness somewhere. Why shouldn't he obtain consolation where he could? Smith did, thought he, why shouldn't he be 'that sort of cad' after all? No one would be any worse; or, let Eileen go to the devil, and force Alice to see more of him and be kinder?

Just at this time an incident occurred which bade fair to precipitate him in his then miserable and

reckless state down to the level of his unfortunate predecessor.

One evening on his final night-round he missed the head night-nurse. This was a night when she should have been on duty. That damsel's subtle blandishments and overtures begun on his first night in the asylum, persisted in, and consistently ignored by Fownes since, had ceased somewhat of late.

He enquired of the deputy where she was.

"She's in bed ill," was the reply.

"Oh, and since when?"

"Only to-night. She did not feel well enough to get up for duty. She said, would you please come and see her, sir?"

John flushed and grew angry, but, of course, he could not refuse to treat the girl.

He finished his round first, and then the deputy conducted him to the head night-nurse's bedroom. He went in with a calm front but some inward tremors. He felt less sure of himself than formerly.

"Good evening, nurse," he said quietly, "what is the trouble?"

"I'm so sorry to bother you, doctor," she replied, "I have such pain in my knees and feel so feverish."

Indeed her appearance bore out her words. There was a hectic flush on each cheek, and her eyes shone.

"Let me see the knees," said the doctor.

She pulled up the bedclothes and John proceeded to test the knee-joints for fluid.

Then he heard a loud click and looked up quickly, to see the door closed and the deputy gone.

He looked at the head night-nurse. She smiled triumphantly and licking one finger daintily rubbed it over her cheek. A pale line remained where the rouge had come off.

John cursed himself for a fool and then laughed bitterly. "A futile trick," he said aloud and walking over to the door tried to insert his master key. It refused to enter the lock; another had been left in on the other side. His face must have expressed the momentary dismay he felt, for a ripple of laughter reached him from the bed. He recovered his composure.

"What do you gain by this, nurse?" he asked coldly.

"The pleasure of your society undisturbed, my lord," replied the girl mischievously.

"I suppose you understand that there are certain penalties attached to these little games?"

She laughed again.

"You're very cross, but it won't wash, doctor. You are quite helpless. So come and sit down and make it up."

"I suppose you are not ill at all?"

"No, innocent, except at heart!" with a challenging glance.

"Then I shall smoke." He lit a pipe in order to think more clearly. What could he do? Absolutely nothing, and he knew it.

He sat down on a chair and smoked in silence.

"You're not entertaining, doctor," remarked the nurse, "Not a bit like Dr. Salter."

"Thank God," said John explicitly.

"You're absolutely horrid, and this will do you a world of good; teach you not to be so uppish with a body another time. To think a man should give himself such righteous airs when he——"

"What?" said John with a dangerous flash of his eyes.

The girl smiled derisively.

He got up and walked over to the bed.

"What were you going to say?" he asked in a suppressed voice.

She tried to return his gaze but her bold eyes fell before the menace in his.

"Only that it was silly to put on airs with me when we've been so loving to our little housemaid!"

John drew a deep breath of relief. He had feared some reference to Alice.

He looked more kindly at the girl. His former recklessness and hunger returned to his heart.

"Let's be friends," coaxed the girl.

Why not? Why not try to find some comfort and happiness here?

He looked at her attentively. She was unquestionably good to look upon. Her dark eyes partly veiled by sweeping lashes sparkled with the light of mischief and challenge. Her abundant hair hung in a sable cloud about her white neck, and her bosom heaved under its cambric covering. Surely a man could find rest and solace in this woman's arms?

A mist came before his eyes. She held out her arms. Slowly he placed his own under them and drawing her to him crushed her against his breast. He pressed a long deliberate kiss upon her responsive lips—and then flung her down on the bed with a curse. No! Not here. These were husks—husks only!

He strode across the room.

The girl was astonished and frightened.

“What is the matter? Why did you do that?” she said in a low voice.

“I would rather strangle you than kiss you!” he said with an awful oath and through his teeth. Even this hardened girl was terrified at his manner.

“Get that door opened!” commanded John hoarsely.

The nurse called out rather faintly and knocked three times on the wall with her key.

The lock clicked again and the door opened. And John went out without a backward glance.

It was partly the unconscious influence of the chaplain that weakened these temptations, and helped John to stand. For they had become fast friends, and John had begun to understand in part the chaplain's rather peculiar personality. Briefly put, he was a man who gave not only his life's work to the furtherance of Christianity, but his very soul and self. By temperament a person with strong tendencies to all human frailties, he deliberately went upon the system of acting in exact opposition to all his desires. Painfully shy, he forced himself into prominence in the cause of his religion. He

felt every rebuff with distressing acuteness, but nevertheless, took every opportunity of exposing himself to such, in the service of his Master. An inherent fondness for joviality (in spite of his shyness) he used to win the hearts, and ultimately the souls, of drunkards. A softness for women became a weapon to win harlots to repentance. But in one direction his heart, through this susceptibility, had strayed beyond control.

He loved Eileen. She never suspected it, and he never hinted it. He hid it absolutely, and to him it became an additional motive to strive to wean her from her present mode of life. That was his greatest cross; his dearest aim, for which fact he sometimes reproached himself, to see her living a blameless life. He had no hopes for himself, or even desire, but for her ultimate good. How slight were his chances of success! But he hoped on.

John did not by any means fully comprehend the life of self repression and sacrifice his friend led, but he perceived enough to engender an admiration for his moral courage. Then, of course, he was grateful for the other's intervention on the afternoon Dr. Smith attacked him. The chaplain, on his side, was attracted by John's honesty of thought and speech, and by the feeling we all experience toward one whom we have greatly benefitted.

He never forced his religious views upon the doctor, for he knew John disliked what he termed "cant," and that he was inclined to scepticism. He had observed the gradual alteration in his friend's demeanour of late, for John began to evince

a dullness and irritability quite at variance with his naturally cheerful disposition, though even this was but a shadow of what he really felt.

"You don't like this life, Fownes," the chaplain remarked on one occasion, "or it d—does not suit you."

"Like it!" exclaimed John. "It's hell! What pleasure does one get in a hole like this?" Professional loyalty had prevented John from imparting his suspicions or discontent with the state of the asylum to his friend.

"Then, forgive m—me, old chap, why stay? I have not l—liked the change in you lately."

"My dear chap," responded John, "I can't go. You'll think me a fool, but the fact is I have er—an affection for Nurse Russell (such was the name assumed by Alice), Mrs. Dennis's sister, you know. You may even have observed it."

The other looked uncomfortable.

"I'm sorry, Fownes," he said. "I would not have asked had I any inkling."

"But she is married," went on John bitterly, "to a parson called Boyne. He and she used not to—"

"Stop, old chap," broke in the chaplain. "Is it n—necessary to t—tell me? Please d—don't feel it is, unless I can be of any service. Perhaps she w—would not wish it."

"You are quite right," said John wearily, "but things have gone so awry with me lately that I'm feeling rather sore. I am afraid it's not much in your line after all, you'd hardly understand."

The other smiled, and said simply,

“ I think I can. I love her sister.”

“ Good God ! ” cried John, and paused in amazement, as he perceived what this must mean to his friend. Then, “ And you stand it ! And don't kill Smith ! You go about your work in the whole-hearted way you do to help *others* ! ” And he stared at the chaplain in wonder. “ How the devil you do it heaven only knows ! ”

The other turned red, shifted in his chair (for they were sitting in John's room), looked alternately at the ceiling and floor, and then said deliberately,

“ Christ enables me to do it, and everything else I do that's any good. It is not so much to do for Him.”

John, rather annoyed, was silent for a moment. It sounded fantastical nonsense to him, but there it was, his friend evidently believed it.

“ But why ? ” he said irritably. “ Why should you deliberately sacrifice yourself on all hands for your ideas ? Other parsons don't.”

“ Suppose,” replied the chaplain slowly, with a light in his eyes John had never seen there before. “ Suppose you and those you love, her you love, had committed a great crime against a kind and just king, and continued to break his laws and stupidly defy him, and, as a result were condemned by the universal law, an equitable law, to death. Then imagine that a friend came forward to stand in your place, in the place of her you love, and died in your stead, freeing you to start afresh, cleansed, honoured and in the king's favour.” Then, apparently forgetful of John's presence, the quiet voice

shook, the honest face glowed and shone as he looked upward and said softly, "Washed in the blood of the Lamb."

John eyed him with astonishment, not unmixed with pity. No answering chord in his heart vibrated to this music. He tried to keep the impatience he felt out of his voice, as he said

"But that is not justice, that my friend should bear my punishment. No just king would satisfy his anger in that way."

"Isn't it? Thank God it is!" said the chaplain, with triumph in his voice. "For the King himself, oh, think of it! Against whom we sinned, bore our punishment Himself to pay our debt! 'And now, therefore,'" he ended with exultation, "'there is *no* condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus.'"

John made no reply. Why should he argue further, and grieve his friend? But he wondered greatly.

Some days after this conversation, he was seated at his window watching wistfully for a sight of Alice. The oppression of the place and his circumstances weighed heavily upon his heart, as he stared at the monotonous prospect he had grown to hate.

Presently he observed a girl emerge from the cottage in which the coachman lived. She carried a bundle in her arms, and appeared to be crying. Then he suddenly perceived that the bundle was a baby. An idea flashed into his mind. Was this the explanation of Dr. Smith's curious conduct on the day of his, John's, arrival? But if he had attended the girl in her confinement, for the black

bag Smith had carried bore that out, why all this secrecy? He scanned her face curiously as she passed his window to turn down into the drive. It seemed familiar, and yet he knew he had never seen the girl before. Then his memory again came to his aid—he had seen a photograph of her; ah, yes, that was it! This was the woman whose torn picture he had found amidst the rubbish in his drawer.

“Poor devil!” muttered John. “Who could blame him?”

The next moment he had forgotten the whole incident, for Alice came out. As usual she was accompanied by one of the few nurses with whom she had struck up an acquaintance. John watched her with mingled sorrow and happiness, as she went down the drive past Smith’s house. Then he stood up with a sudden oath. Dr. Smith emerged from his garden and overtook the girls. He appeared to address a few words to Alice’s companion. The nurse turned, and began to retrace her steps towards the Asylum. Alice and Dr. Smith went on into the public road.

John’s first impulse was to go out and stop them, then he hesitated, he could not make a scene in the street before Alice. He swore again violently. So he was right in suspecting Smith after all, he thought. The dog! But he’d put a stop to it! He wished the epileptic brute would die in his next delirious bout (Smith had had two much milder ones since the first John had witnessed).

“I can, and will, stand it no longer!” he said aloud, with fierce doggedness. “I’ll take her out

of it, whether she will or no, neither heaven nor hell shall stop me ! ”

He went straight over to the superintendent's house, and enquired for Mrs. Dennis. He was shown into the drawing-room and asked to wait. Mrs. Dennis was lying down for a nap, and would be down presently.

He paced feverishly about the room for a while, then stopped in front of a photograph of Alice. Memories of the past crowded into his mind as he studied the well-beloved features. He remembered how he had first seen her stretched fast asleep in girlish abandon among the sweet-smelling hay, how he had gazed with bated breath and a new wonder in his heart, and then crept away as from holy ground. Then, when he first spoke to her the next day, what a tremulous joy that was ! He had gone out deliberately in the hope of finding her in the same field, nor had he been disappointed, there she was in a big sunbonnet, picking pink campion and blue speedwell from the hedgerow. And he had thought how the flowers matched her cheeks and eyes (this was not strictly true, but what matter ?) Then, later, their stolen meetings in an old barn, how he had lived for them ! So his thoughts wandered amid these distant visions. Oh, how distant they seemed now ! What was the good ? He turned away from the photograph with an aching heart, and flinging himself into a chair, rested his head in his hands.

Presently Eileen, looking sadder than formerly, entered the room.

“ Why, John,” she said. “ Whatever is wrong ?”

“ You see what things have come to through your hardness to Alice and me,” he said bitterly. “ Smith, not content with monopolising her in my presence, has just gone out with her.”

“ You silly boy,” she said, with affected indifference, but paling slightly. “ Why, you’ll be jealous of your own shadow next.”

“ That is all very fine,” he returned angrily. “ I am not blind. I know, and I will not have it. I give you notice from now that I will meet her all I can, and look after her myself.”

Eileen sighed heavily.

“ I was afraid so,” she said. “ Only be honest with yourself. You have made up your mind to break your promise, and this jealousy is an excuse.”

“ It is false,” cried John hotly. “ I don’t trust Smith. Why I should be a nice fool to let another man enjoy the privileges denied me. Why don’t you keep Smith to yourself ? ”

This remark was the only reference direct or indirect that he had ever made to her relations with the superintendent, and he was ashamed the moment he had said it. Eileen grew whiter than ever.

“ I am a blackguard,” said John. “ Forgive me, Eileen. I am so miserable, and love her so.”

She made no reply.

“ Well,” he went on, his voice hardening again, “ I will see Smith myself, and tell him my view of the matter.”

“ Oh, do not anger him, for God’s sake, John,” she appealed. “ He has been so morose lately.

He does not seem himself between his attacks now."

"Eileen, I would do much for you," he said doggedly, "but I cannot stand by and see Alice molested."

"He means no harm," she insisted. "Alice amuses him, and only takes his mind off his dreadful bouts."

"I hope not. I'll see he does none. Ah, here he is, by gad," he added, as through the window he saw Dr. Smith come up the garden path.

"John, I implore you to be patient and say nothing to him. I will speak to him quietly some time," said Eileen hurriedly.

"You think only of him and yourself," said he, rather unjustly. "I mean to think of Alice and myself."

Then he went to meet Dr. Smith. The superintendent looked flushed and annoyed, but said quietly,

"Ha, Fownes, come in and have some nicotine."

"Thanks," said John grimly. "I do want a word with you."

Dr. Smith led the way into his smoking-room, and gave John a cigar.

"I think I ought to tell you, though I thought until recently that you knew," began John bitterly, "that I have an affection for Mrs. Dennis's sister."

He paused, and lit the cigar slowly. Smith opened his eyes.

"In fact," John went on, "we became engaged some years ago."

"Indeed," said the other ironically, "I congratulate you, Fownes."

"The reason I tell you now," pursued John, with

forced quietude, "is that though you appear to know something about it, you also appear recently to have forgotten it. In short, I must ask you to leave Alice alone. You will understand what I mean, and I will not permit it."

"Indeed," repeated Smith. "And what about the lady's husband? It strikes me that the rôle of the injured fiancé is hardly applicable to your case."

"Applicable or not," said John, unable to control his anger any longer, "if you don't let her alone I'll break your neck!"

Smith smiled contemptuously.

"Boy's talk," he said. "Suppose we let her husband settle the question? He must be nearly as anxious for her as you are, and I must admit, to my mind with more justice. Suppose we write and tell him where she is? But come," he added, "let us be friendly rivals if possible. We both hunt the same hare. If she prefers you, you shall have her, if me, then let me."

"You cad!" said John, with concentrated fury; the more so because the other's insinuation approached the truth. "Now take due warning. If I catch you speaking to her more than to other nurses, I'll half kill you first, and get you kicked out of your job as a half-mad drunken epileptic after."

Smith blanched to a sickly pallor, and licked his dry lips. He appeared to experience a violent inward struggle. Then he burst into a loud laugh that almost rang true.

"Well, Fownes," he said, with an appearance of great bonhomie, "I am very glad indeed to see that

your affection for Eileen's sister is indeed so honourable a one. I must ask your pardon, but I was just making a little test for Eileen's and my own satisfaction, for, of course, I knew you loved her, and I had imagined you were growing a little restive lately. But I have got my punishment, you have not dealt very gently with me! Why, my dear fellow, you are very silly to have been jealous of an old man like me!"

The acting was good. He linked his arm in John's, and led him in to tea, and John was too bewildered to resist. He ate his tea in silence. Smith, on the other hand, rattled on.

When John rose to go, he turned to the other, and said with a meaning look.

"Test or not, Dr. Smith, remember that I meant what I said."

The superintendent smiled satirically, but made no comment until John was gone. Then, turning to Eileen, he said savagely,

"I'll get that young waster out of the place somehow. The impudent blackguard abused me to my face, but I'll make it my business to break him! I'll find a way to do it, and yet shut his mouth."

"Are you wise to quarrel with him, Leonard?" said Eileen quietly.

"You trust to me. I only have the ear of the Committee, but I will think out a way to get him discredited and disgraced, then if he talks his words will have no weight. Don't you see, girl, that if I don't crush him, he will me?"

"I do not think he would injure you unless you

thwarted him. Leonard, you must not be too much in Alice's society, and make him jealous." She tried to say this naturally, and as if she regarded Smith's attention to her sister as nothing.

He eyed her curiously under his lids.

"I will soon settle that," he said, "I'll get your sister away somewhere where he'll never find her, by God!"

She looked at him steadily.

"And where is that, Leonard?" she asked.

"Anywhere. There, I beg your pardon, Eileen, I will find her a comfortable billet in another asylum."

"I think that would be wise," she said quietly. "I have wondered why you had not done so before."

"Well, hang it, girl, one can't always do it in a moment, but I'll manage it somehow now," he muttered.

That very night Dr. Smith wrote to the medical superintendent of an asylum some one hundred and fifty miles away, in another county. In due course he received a reply. This was to the effect that there was a vacancy for a nurse. "Indeed," said that doctor, "the more the merrier. I can do with them."

By sending Alice to a place so far off, Dr. Smith would effectually prevent John from visiting her, as it was within his power to refuse his A.M.O. undue leave of absence. He also hoped, at all events at first, to keep John in ignorance of her whereabouts, but without much confidence. As superintendent he took practically what leave he liked for short periods, so there would be nothing in the distance to prevent him going to see her.

Eileen was deputed to persuade Alice of the wisdom of this step. In addition to her affection for her sister, Eileen was influenced by the hope that Alice's absence would soon efface the impression she had made on Smith's mind. Her chief weapon to convince Alice was the interview with John in which he had kicked over the traces and vowed to go his own way. Alice experienced a thrill half pleasure, half fear when Eileen told her, but it is doubtful if she would have acquiesced in Smith's plan so readily had not the latter found a powerful, but unconscious, ally in John. That tenacious youth, true to his word, waylaid Alice the next evening, and renewed his entreaties that they should go away together. Alice remained firm, but, fearing that she could not maintain an indefinite resistance against her sweetheart, she fell in with Eileen's arrangements, not without many tears, and agreed to start away in the early morning in four days time.

Meantime she was advised to remain indoors, except during John's morning round. This scheme of smuggling Alice out of the asylum unknown to John, failed, owing to the weakness of one of the conspirators. Alice secretly wrote a farewell note to John, in which she told him she was again going away to escape his importunity. This fact, however, and a few gentle reproaches and expressions of affection, was the sum total of information contained therein. She neither told him when, nor where she was going.

John rendered more miserable and reckless than

ever, swore he would find out. Of course, none of the three principals in the plot would tell him. He was at his wits end, when he bethought him of trying to "pump" the matron and charge-nurse of Alice's ward. Probably they would at least know when she was to leave. But whether they had been warned to keep silence or not, they could, or would, tell him nothing. Then he conceived another plan, he began to question his housemaid, Rose. She bridled at once. She knew his name had been coupled with Nurse Russell's (for nothing escapes the eagle eyes of asylum gossips) and was jealous. If she couldn't have him, nobody else should, if she could help it; so she professed ignorance.

"Couldn't she find out from some of the nurses?"

"No, she didn't see how she could."

"Not if he asked her as a special favour to be kind to him?"

"Well, all the kindness ought not to be on one side."

So he cajoled her, put his arm round her, and said that anyone with such beautiful eyes could not have a hard heart. And, as she seemed to relent, the young reprobate kissed her, and the silly girl cried and promised to do what she could.

Rose, without much difficulty, found out what he wanted to know, and came with beaming eyes to tell him. He was so grateful that he kissed her again, and she appeared to be satisfied with her reward, for like a sensible girl, she was beginning to think reasonably of her doctor. John learnt that Alice was to leave early next morning to catch a

train at half-past five at the station ; the informant did not know her destination. But that was all John needed.

The following morning, before it was light, Dr. Smith got up and went round to the stables himself. He harnessed the pony in the dog-cart, which seated four, and led it quietly round to his front entrance. Here he tied the pony to the gate and walked in to acquaint the women, for Eileen proposed to see her sister safely installed at the new asylum. They were ready, and the three, with very different feelings, went down to the trap. In it, seated upon the box seat, reins in hand, was John. Smith swore ; Alice screamed faintly.

With heightened colour, and flashing eyes John remarked grimly.

“ Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I’m going to drive you to the station.”

“ Are you ! ” said Smith savagely. “ And who is going to be in the asylum if anything is wanted ? ”

“ Damn the asylum ! ” said John. “ You can stay yourself if you’re anxious.”

“ You’ll get sacked for this ! ” said the other violently.

“ A fat lot I care ! ”

“ You shan’t go. I’ll rouse some attendants and have you forcibly removed ! ”

“ Do,” said John. “ I’m just in the mood to murder a few people.” He looked meaningly at Smith.

Eileen whispered hurriedly to the superintendent.

“ True,” said the latter more quietly. “ I had forgotten.”

“ Well, get up girls,” he added. “ Let the fool drive us. It will be the last thing he’ll do here.”

Alice got up beside John. Her cheeks were glowing, and her eyes dancing, as she met his reckless gaze. She gave his arm a gentle pinch, and he laughed aloud.

They soon reached the station. John kept near Smith as he took the tickets, and overheard Alice’s destination. Then, before she got into the train, he deliberately lifted her off her feet, and kissed her repeatedly until she escaped with scarlet face from his arms, and took refuge with Eileen in their compartment. As the train started, Alice leaned out of the window and kissed her hand to John, then she drew in her head and burst into violent weeping.

“ Now you dog,” said John, turning to the superintendent, “ Do your worst, and be damned to you ! ”

Smith, livid with rage, made no reply, but walked out of the station. They mounted in front together, and John again took the reins.

It was just growing light.

As they left the town and turned into the long willow-begirt road, a dark figure suddenly rose up behind the hedge on the right. There was a puff of smoke, a loud re-echoing report, and Dr. Smith, with a groan, rolled out of the rapidly moving trap into the road. Another shot rent the morning stillness. With a cry of pain John dropped the reins and shook his right hand violently. A third report rang out, but the already terrified pony, freed from control, had dashed wildly up the road out of range.

CHAPTER XIV

WE must now ask the reader to return with us to London. We have neglected the Rev. James Boyne a good deal lately, but proceed immediately to make amends.

We left him entering his house upon the night he and John met at Charing Cross, and enjoyed a ride together in a taxicab.

He went into his library, now chilly and neglected, and lit the fire with a newspaper and some wood he discovered in the kitchen. He had dismissed his servants. He sat down before it and rested his burning head in his hands. His heart was hot within him, his brain throbbled with a deep hatred of John Fownes.

His former housemaid he had closely questioned anent his wife's departure, but without gleaning any substantial information. He thought she was concealing her knowledge, so paid her up and sent her home. He imagined that he surprised the cook indulging in a meaning smile at his expense, so he got rid of her. The natural astonishment of the tradesmen's employees at seeing the door opened by himself, he had construed as insolent triumph over his loss. He conceived the idea that they knew all about his wife and were amazed at his conduct, so he told them not to call, and did his own shopping.

His parishoners on the last two Sundays had indeed eyed him with covert curiosity, his aspect was so changed. Of course, these innocent people knew nothing whatever about his trouble, but he interpreted their glances as indicative of satisfied expectation. When they conversed in groups after the service, they seemed to him to cast derisive looks over their shoulders in his direction and to gossip about his shame. On one occasion he was certain he heard one of them say to his wife,

“ He ill treated her, and she left him for a doctor.”

This last incident had occurred a fortnight ago. Since then the change in him had become even more obvious. He grew haggard, thin and furtive. But then he ate hardly anything, because one day his meat tasted queer, so he gave up meat. Then the bread smelt strangely, so he discarded bread. Indeed, of late he had subsisted entirely upon eggs and water; it was difficult for people to put drugs or poison in eggs or tap-water.

Very likely the men that brought his food were in Fownes' pay. Fownes longed for his death. Possibly even his congregation were in the plot, and working to reduce him to penury. The fools! They could not do that.

These ideas took firm root. They accounted completely for people's conduct. There must be a conspiracy, instituted by Fownes, first to annoy him, then to ruin his reputation, and finally to poison him. The last two or three nights had more than confirmed this conception, for his enemies had brought to bear upon him a wireless

telephone which kept him awake, and through which Fownes abused him and whispered blasphemy into his ear.

Then they assaulted him in bed by electric currents, and drove him wild by wireless photographs of frightful scenes projected on to the wall of his bedroom; sometimes it would be his wife being mutilated, at others himself strangling her—until he would get up shaking with horror, and shriek at them! Then they sometimes went, but he was compelled to keep wakeful to circumvent any fresh means of attack they might adopt.

And it was all done by Fownes, Fownes, Fownes!

He remained in this state for two or three months, sometimes better, sometimes tormented by visions almost beyond endurance.

After a while the voices somehow took upon them a great authority, and became as the voice of God. He heard it by day as well as night. At first accusing, it grew commanding. He became the avenger of God.

“Kill him, kill him!” repeated the voice a hundred times a day.

Then a day came when he could bear this voice no longer, so he got up and went out. . . .

One fine morning Dr. Rogers was engaged, according to his habit, in interviewing the great and mighty among his patients in the consulting room, while his assistant attended to the needs of the despised, the pauper, and the insured in the surgery.

The routine adopted was for the assistant to open the door, greet the patients, and sort them out into

sheep and goats. This process of division requires some skill on the part of the classifier, and this is where the difference in value between an experienced assistant and a boy just qualified begins—and ends!

The goats our assistant dealt with, the sheep snubbed him, and said they wished to see the “doctor” (though he was qualified, and had taken honours!) Who would not be an assistant? The sheep thus treating him with polite disdain, he duly hated them. The same state of affairs obtained with the goats, only here the parts were reversed, these wretched creatures being despised by the assistant, who in his turn was heartily disliked by them. But what would you have?

Most of the poor “Billies” and “Nannies” could not, without an incredible amount of trouble, change their doctor under that philanthropic measure, the National Insurance Act; and for the remainder, was not Dr. Rogers Poor Law Medical Officer, and were not they as paupers, worms?

Well, this morning an undoubted Mutton put his head into the surgery, to particularize, our friend the Rev. J. Boyne.

“Good morning,” said the assistant, with a crooked smile.

“Where is your master?” asked Boyne absently.

Rogers, who overheard from within the holy of holies, chuckled mightily.

“*Dr. Rogers,*” said the assistant, pretending to attend to a goat, “is disengaged. Will you go in there, please.”

Then he retired into the far end of the surgery to swear volubly.

“*Master!* That was the limit!”

“Ah, good day to you, Mr. Boyne,” said Rogers affably, as the clergyman entered the consulting room. “I am sorry to see you are not looking quite the thing.” What he thought was, “Looks damn bad, ought to be some money here, thank goodness.”

“I am not quite well, I thank you,” replied Boyne. “I do not sleep well, owing to—” he stopped abruptly.

“Ah, yes, quite,” said Rogers encouragingly.

“Could you give me anything for insomnia?” continued the other.

“Why don’t you sleep?” Rogers queried, “Have you pain, or are you worried, or simply cannot get off as it were?”

“No, I have no pain,” replied Boyne. “I get ah—trains of ideas which I cannot banish.”

“Ah, I see, exactly; a little cerebral congestion. We’ll soon put that right. Too much mental concentration I fear, a little over-study, eh?” and he shook a finger playfully at Boyne.

“Excuse me a moment,” he added, “I will get you something made up.”

He went into the surgery, and remarked carelessly to his assistant.

“Chap with insomnia, give him some chloral or something, just four doses, s.o.s.nocte.

“Right” said the other sulkily. “*Master!*” he muttered again.

Rogers returned to the consulting room, and chatted to Boyne while the medicine was being made up. The conversation naturally turned upon Fownes, their mutual friend.

"I expect you miss Dr. Fownes," said Boyne.

"As a companion I do, a great deal," replied Rogers. "But he did not care for general practice. I expect he finds his present work very different. I hope he keeps well."

"No doubt," said Boyne, "But is the climate then unhealthy?"

"Rudford? Oh, no, I meant the nature of the work," answered Rogers. "Living in an asylum tries the nerves, you know."

"Without doubt, but nevertheless I should imagine that it has charms of its own. To have the entire mental and moral control of a large number of persons must entail a great deal of absorbingly interesting work."

"Well, I hope Fownes will find it so," said Rogers, "ah, here is your medicine. Take a dose at bedtime occasionally, and let me have the pleasure of seeing you again in a few days."

"Thank you, I am obliged to you, doctor," said Boyne, placing five shillings on the table. "Good-bye, remember me to Dr. Fownes when you write."

"Try a higher pillow," suggested Rogers, as the clergyman went out.

"Five bob," sighed the doctor with satisfaction, "and by the look of him a good many more to come."

"I loathe these damned, swanking parsons,"

observed the assistant vindictively, appearing suddenly in the room.

"Hullo, my lord, are you there?" said Rogers gaily, "How did he bite you?"

"Me? Oh, he was all right to *me*," replied the other mendaciously, "But didn't you notice how superciliously he looked at your consulting-room?"

"Did he, the dog?" queried Rogers curiously. The consulting-room was his pride, and indeed deserved it.

"It's true," he continued, "parsons are the deuce, but I am in sympathy with some of their precepts. my boy. Truth for instance is a jewel, in assistants even more than in their, er—masters."

The assistant coloured violently.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Rogers, "A bulls-eye, begad!"

The assistant, who was an Irishman, consoled himself with a muttered string of profanity.

"Hush, hush, my son!" reproved Rogers, pointing to the surgery.

"Oh, that's all right," was the reply. "There's only some blank insurance blighters."

"I must attend to them myself," exclaimed the other, pretending to rush eagerly out of the room.

"Well, Mrs., what's the matter with you?" he enquired of a neatly dressed woman, obviously of gentle nurture. Then, without waiting for a reply, "What do you want, my man?" he added turning to a clerk. The fatal pink card was in both their hands."*

* The pink card has been abolished since this was written. A buff one has taken its place.

“ See to these people, doctor,” said Rogers indifferently to his assistant, “ and then come in and help me.”

The latter “ saw to them,” viz., ordered them both the same medicine, one of the stock mixtures agreed upon between the local panel doctors and chemists, though the woman had bronchitis, and the man a bad leg. “ Mist. Sod, et Gentian.”

Then there was a young insured lady, who came regularly because she had a penchant for red hair, in which tint the Irish assistant’s head rejoiced. She had nothing wrong with her, but as she very justly observed, “ she paid for her medical treatment, why shouldn’t she have it? It was not her fault if she wasn’t seriously ill.” And it must be admitted that it certainly was not. She asserted manfully that she had a dreadful pain in her back, and could hardly stand. Well, who knows? She may have had. So she was “ on the club,” and obtained her sick pay and her satisfaction in contemplating red hair, every week as regularly as clockwork. But why multiply instances of this kind? They would only bore the reader, and their name is legion.

CHAPTER XV

FEELING faint and dizzy for a moment, John leaned back against the seat of the dog-cart. Then he rapidly bound a handkerchief round his injured hand. He snatched up the reins with the other, and with the aid of his knees, pulled up the pony, and turning her round, after some difficulty, drove back to the spot where Dr. Smith had fallen. Short as the time had been since the first shot, the assailant had dragged the superintendent on to the path. He lay with his hands folded neatly across his chest ; half a pocket handkerchief covered an abrasion he had sustained in his fall, and two pennies rested upon his closed lids. A glance sufficed to satisfy John that life was extinct.

He began to look about for the murderer. He scrambled through the hedges ; scanned the fields on both sides, but could see no one. He returned to the trap, climbed in, and drove as well as he was able to the police station. The inspector on duty, who knew John by sight, at once despatched a constable to watch the body, and then proceeded to listen to the details of John's story with professional indifference. He did not gather a great deal of information from John, for the latter knew no more than our reader. Then he drove John back to the seat of the murder, and began his own examination. During this, John remembered that

the asylum was without a doctor, but he waited for the arrival of the police surgeon, who had been sent for, and asked him to look at his hand. The bullet had passed through his palm, but had done little damage. It only required dressing, so John, saying he could do that himself, borrowed the constable to drive him back to the asylum.

Here he telephoned the news to the Chairman of the Asylum Committee. After that he sent a message to the charge attendant of the infirmary ward to come to his room and dress his hand. This being completed to his satisfaction, he sat down, lit a cigarette, and began for the first time to think about the tragedy, and what it meant to him.

Frankly, he was not particularly affected by Smith's death. He was, of course, sorry for Eileen, but when she got over the shock, he thought, she'd be all the better for being rid of the superintendent, and his epileptic bouts. On Alice's behalf he was satisfied. For his friend the chaplain's sake, he was glad. And himself, how did it affect him?

In the first place Dr. Smith's death removed one more obstacle from between himself and Alice.

Then, the post of medical superintendent at the asylum was rendered vacant. It was possible that he might get that. True he had not been there more than three or four months, but then he knew the routine, and was steady and energetic. If he did, there would be an end of the wretched life he was living. He would have Alice back to his asylum. Then who knew what might happen?

Then, he thought over the circumstances of the

murder. Who could the mysterious assailant be, some enemy of Smith's? If so, why should he have fired at him (John) afterwards? Perhaps to get rid of a possible witness. But it was a silly, public way to kill a man. Could it be some discharged patient who had relapsed, and taken his revenge for past real or imaginary injuries at Smith's hands? Then the bandaged head, and the pennies on the body's eyes, they surely were the acts of a lunatic. What possible purpose could be served by doing these things? The murderer had deliberately exposed himself to capture by thus lingering in the vicinity of his crime.

The insanity of the assailant appeared on the whole to John to be the most reasonable hypothesis.

He would have to break the news to Eileen when she returned. He rather dreaded this ordeal, the more so because he could not pretend to feel any great sympathy with her loss of such a man.

Presently he heard hurried footsteps ascending his stairs, and the chaplain burst into the room.

"What a t-terrible thing this is, Fownes," he exclaimed. "It is dreadful to be taken so suddenly, so unprepared."

"Yes," said John, coolly, "It must be a shock!"

"How awful for Mrs. Dennis. Poor, poor girl, God help her!" said the other fervently.

"Yes, I suppose so," replied John composedly, "But when all's said and done, she'll be much better without him. If she gets out of this hole she'll soon lose the perverted affection she has for him. It is a product of the life here."

“ True, you are right,” said the chaplain, “ but you are hard, Fownes.”

“ Perhaps, but you see, I didn’t like him,” returned John, “ And you’ve nothing to grumble at, why, man, she’ll be free now,” he added with genuine pleasure for his friend.

“ Yes, but at what cost! It will break her heart.”

“ I hope not, indeed,” said John, with rather more feeling. “ And think not. You judge her affection by your own.”

“ When does she return? ” asked the chaplain, for he had gone over to the superintendent’s house the moment he heard of the tragedy, and had been told where Eileen and Alice were.

“ Her sister will have to come back with her, for she cannot be left alone,” he added.

“ So she will, by jove,” said John, joyfully, “ What a chap you are to think of things! I don’t know when Eileen is due back, that’s the difficulty. I hope she’ll hear nothing before she gets here,” he added, “ though, goodness knows, I don’t relish the job of breaking it to her.”

“ I will do that, Fownes,” said the chaplain quietly.

“ By jove, yes. You are a good chap. I am awfully grateful.”

“ You have no need to be, old man,” returned the other, “ It was n-not for your sake I suggested it, but for hers.”

“ You are quite right,” said John without resentment, “ I doubt in fact whether I could do it decently, certainly not so well as you, but it will be harder for you. How shall you catch her? ”

“ I’ll look out a t-train, and wire them to c-come by it. Then I’ll charter a taxicab to meet them, and will see them myself first, on their arrival.”

“ Good. That’s a weight off my mind,” said John. “ Now that was the only reason I had to regret his death. In every other way it’s a blessing. I may even get the superintendency.”

The other looked at him sorrowfully.

“ As you know, Fownes,” he said with an effort, “ No one would be more pleased than myself, but I had far rather you received a kinder heart, more charitable, with a little of Christ’s love.”

John shrugged his shoulders.

“ All right, old chap,” he said brightly, “ You never know your luck ! I may some day. In the meantime I am disposed to enjoy the benefits I get, however gained.”

The chaplain left to carry out his plan concerning Eileen. He wired—“ It is very urgent for you to both return at once, things very wrong with Dr. Smith. 11.50 train will be met,” and signed his own name without a qualm of conscience for this partial lie in a good cause.

John had his breakfast.

“ Sad thing, Rose, Dr. Smith’s death,” he remarked to his hebe when she brought it.

“ I never liked him,” she said, “ I do so hope you get his job.”

“ I hope to goodness I do, or I’ll never stop in this hole. If I do,” he added, “ I’ll make you my housekeeper until er—you get married.”

She shook her head.

"You weren't going to say that," she said quietly, "nor should I be your housekeeper."

"Why not?" said John in astonishment.

"Because I'm not such a fool now. I want to get over my silliness, and—and I shouldn't if I was your housekeeper."

"You're a dear good little girl," said John impulsively, "and worth ten of such blackguards as me." I'm only too thankful thought he, "that I didn't behave as a cad to her."

"Do you know, Rose," he went on, "if I hadn't been in love with somebody else, I'd have asked you to marry me."

"I believe you would," she said rather sadly, "but as it is—" she held out her hand timidly, but with a brave smile.

John shook it almost humbly.

"I didn't know this girl," he muttered after she had left the room. "She's a gem, but what the devil she saw in me to turn her pretty head so silly at one time, heaven only knows."

It will be perceived that John was recovering his good spirits. He went about his customary morning rounds. The patients behaved as usual, and for the most part, evinced a marked lack of interest in Dr. Smith's death; a few complimented the Almighty upon the justice of what they pleased to call His retribution. On the other hand, a new respect for John appeared to animate the staff. He was almost overwhelmed by the effusiveness of the matron.

John attacked his lunch that day with a healthy appetite, an unusual event of late.

"That looks good," he remarked to Rose as she deposited a steaming plum-pudding before him.

Rose giggled.

"Eh?" said John, "What's the row?"

"I'll tell you when you've eaten your pudding, doctor."

"Why not now?"

"You might not eat it. I'll tell you as I clear away."

"Oh, woman, what a delectable morsel is a mystery to thy palate! I suppose I must wait."

He ate his pudding, and rang the bell.

Rose re-appeared with her charming smile, and a tray.

"Well, Miss mystery?"

"Well, sir. Just before last Christmas a male patient was found missing ("oh!" protested John). He used to work in the engine house and they searched high and low for him for days. At last they gave it up, thinking he had escaped. What steps Dr. Smith took I don't know. Anyway, Christmas came round and we forgot all about the lost patient and enjoyed our Christmas dinners. About three weeks later the engineer thought one of the boilers was working foul, so he had it emptied and got in to look round it. You see they only use one boiler at a time and alternately.

"Quite," said John.

"Well, in this boiler he found some buttons!"

"Good Lord! You don't mean——?"

“ Yes, I do ! The engineer remembered then that some patients had been cleaning that boiler before Christmas and the lost one must have stayed in ! Then the water had been turned in, and our plum-puddings were boiled in that same water in the kitchen ! ”

“ It’s a yarn ! It never happened here at all. ”

“ Well, anyhow, none of the staff will eat plum-pudding since ! I won’t swear it was here. ”

“ But the engineer would have found something besides buttons. ”

“ Oh, I dare say he did. But that’s how it was told to me. ”

John grew serious. “ If it’s true wherever it occurred it’s a ghastly piece of negligence then, and a horrible tragedy, and just on a par with the conduct of this place in general. ”

Rose looked rather astonished and crestfallen at his earnestness.

“ I thought it would amuse you, ” she said.

“ Amuse me ? Of course, here one laughs at death ! There it’s all right, Rose ; don’t look hurt. Never mind me. I am much obliged for your story. Yes ! a very laughable incident ! ”

Then Rose retired in bewilderment.

Shortly after lunch the chairman of the asylum committee arrived. John had met him several times on committee days. He was a pompous but kindly old gentleman, and much respected in the county.

“ This is a very sad business, Dr. Fownes, ” said

he. "The county has lost a very valuable and single-minded servant in Dr. Smith, and in a distressingly tragic manner. I am indeed extremely sorry. We have had singularly ill luck in the place of late. Will you please tell me the details?"

John again related what he knew of the affair. The chairman, after some consideration, and numerous questions, agreed with John that the most likely solution of the mystery was the supposition of the insanity of the murderer.

"Probably a former patient," he said, "and I have no doubt that the wretched man will soon be arrested."

Then an idea appeared suddenly to strike him.

"How was it, Dr. Fownes," he asked, "that both Dr. Smith and yourself were away from the asylum at the same time? Was it Dr. Smith's wish?"

John blushed.

"No," he said, "it was my own idea."

"But what was your object?"

"It was entirely my own fault," said John frankly, having made up his mind, "It has never happened before, and I am sorry I cannot tell you why it did this time. It shall not happen again, if I remain here."

"I suppose it had nothing to do with any idea that Dr. Smith would be attacked?"

"Oh, no, sir, nothing whatever."

"Well, Dr. Fownes, you say if you remain here, and I think it possible that you may remain here some considerable time"—with a smile—"but if you do, you must not always be so mysterious with your chairman!"

“ I certainly should not, sir,” said John in the same spirit, “ if I had that luck.”

“ Well, well, I can make no promises, but we shall see.”

Then they entered into a discussion upon the management of the asylum, about which the chairman was completely ignorant, but John helped him out. John was, of course, to be responsible for the conduct of the place pending the appointment of a permanent chief.

John made a great effort, spurred on by the thought of Alice ; he instilled facts into the chairman so skilfully that the latter imagined that he was imparting the information, and was secretly pleased and impressed by his own knowledge.

On his departure he said,

“ You will continue to live in your own quarters for the present, Dr. Fownes, but with full powers as acting medical superintendent. I may say that I have formed a favourable opinion of your abilities, by which you will not be the loser.”

“ I am much obliged to you for your good opinion, sir,” said John, highly pleased, for this remark from such a source was almost tantamount to a promise of the superintendentship.

Then John had another visitor, a detective-officer, who subjected him to a long cross examination anent the tragedy. This gentleman went away apparently in a very different humour to the chairman of the committee.

In the course of the afternoon Eileen returned with her sister. On the receipt of the chaplain's

telegram, she had at once thought that Dr. Smith had suddenly developed an extra bad attack of his malady. Why Alice was needed she had no idea. But she imposed implicit confidence in the chaplain, so after profuse apologies to the wondering superintendent of the other asylum, they had both left.

We will pass over Eileen's anguish and despair when she learnt her loss, and the consolation Alice and the chaplain endeavoured to afford her.

In the evening, John called to express his sympathy with Eileen—and to see Alice. He did not expect to see the former, but to his chagrin he was also denied the latter; she sent word down that she could not leave her sister. So, considerably vexed, he returned to the asylum.

The next afternoon he called again. He was informed that Mrs. Dennis was much the same. "Could he see her sister?" "No, she did not feel free to leave Mrs. Dennis yet."

John went back to his quarters in a rage.

"It was all damn nonsense pretending she couldn't leave her sister for a moment. The little minx was going to try to avoid him, and very likely later, to slip off to the other asylum again without seeing him. But she shouldn't if he knew it!"

He fumed and worried himself for the rest of the day.

When night came his impatience grew uncontrollable, and casting caution and decency to the winds, he went over again. He sent in a message that he had something important to communicate to Alice. This time he was informed that Nurse Russell would see him for a moment.

Very soon Alice, looking distressed and pale, came in.

"What important thing have you to tell me, John, that you persist in worrying us at such a time?" she said, rather coldly.

"So that's the way you greet me, after avoiding me all this time!"

"Well, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Think of poor Eileen's distress, and mine, and how needful I am to her."

"That's all an excuse," he said angrily. "You have been deliberately keeping away from me. Why are you distressed I should like to know. Was he anything to you?"

"John, do not be so silly," with a touch of hauteur. "Now tell me please what you had to say to me."

"Of course it never occurred to you that I wanted to *see* you. You wouldn't care if you never saw me for a month!" said John bitterly.

She smiled.

"Nonsense, sir! Had you, then, nothing special to say?"

"Oh, nothing to interest you much, it has no bearing on your sister or Smith! Only that I shall probably get the superintendentship here."

"I'm so glad," she said, rather vaguely. "Would it mean so much to you?"

"It would mean that we should have lots of money, that I could take what time off I liked; that we should be able to live instead of exist. If I get it you must chuck the nursing drudgery, and

we can go about together, and have a good time."

Alice made no reply.

"Well, dear," he persisted, with forced composure. "Won't it be fine? What do you think? Can't you speak?"

Alice perceived his drift, and what was implied. But seeing how dangerous was his mood, she temporised.

"John, will you write to —— asylum, and say I cannot go there now."

"You darling!" he cried, "I am so glad you are going to be sensible about that."

"I mean that I cannot leave Eileen for the present."

"Oh, of course, it's for anybody's sake but mine! There's always some infernal person or other put before me, with you."

Alice held her peace.

"Now, why should you leave here at all?" he went on impatiently. "Why can't we be happy?"

"I should not be happy if I stayed here."

"Little hypocrite! Now, I warn you, Alice, I cannot put up with much more of it. I shall take the matter into my own hands!" He said this with darkening cheek, and eyes afire.

"John, you are not yourself," she said bravely, but with inward tremors. "This is unworthy of you, especially at such a time."

He breathed heavily.

"Cant," he said roughly, "come, give me a kiss."

"I won't!" trying to free her hands, which he had seized.

Then she began to cry—certainly the wisest course.

He flung her hands away, and swearing deeply, strode across the room.

Then Eileen came in.

“What are you doing, John?” she asked wearily, “Why is Alice crying?”

At the sight of the elder woman’s drawn face John was dumb.

Alice dried her eyes, and said,

“It is nothing, dearest. I am a silly girl, and cried for nothing.”

“I cannot cry,” said Eileen, dully. “But you must not grieve Alice, John.”

“I won’t,” said John, with an air of dismal finality. “I’ll go. Eileen, I can feel for you, I’m not in much better case.”

The following afternoon an inquest was held upon Dr. Smith, and John gave his evidence before the coroner. Nothing of any particular interest transpired. The police were in possession of clues, but had not made an arrest. Death was due to the bullet of an automatic pistol that had pierced the aorta.

The jury returned a verdict of wilful murder against some person unknown.

That same evening a patient suffering from a tuberculous knee that had been suppurating gaily and undisturbed for months, decided to end his misery. He struggled up in bed and managed to reach a picture that hung at its head. He broke the glass and, selecting a piece with a good cutting

edge, proceeded to saw his way through his wind-pipe. He was interrupted in this dissection by the attendant under whose charge his ward was, and John was sent for.

He found the patient in a pool of blood, and sewed up the wound. To a healthy man the cut would not have proved dangerous, but to a patient weakened by prolonged suppuration, whose internal organs were largely converted into waxy matter thereby, it was sufficient. He died the same night.

This incident occurred in a so-called observation ward. The attendant in charge had been in the scullery making himself some coffee and conversing with another during its occurrence. Not being certain how Dr. Fownes viewed these little accidents he was not so easy in his mind as he would have been had Dr. Smith reigned supreme.

Being an old asylum hand he thought a little guidance might be useful to Dr. Fownes, and incidentally save himself from trouble. Hence the following interesting conversation:

“ He would 'ave died soon any'ow, would'nt 'e, sir ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ An 'ealthy man wouldn't 'ave been 'urt much by a little cut like that, would 'e, sir ? ”

“ No.”

“ In fack you might a'most say he died of 'is consumptive leg, mightn't you, sir ? ”

“ You might.”

John was interested and perceived the drift of these interrogations. But it was a revelation to

him. How Smith's attitude and example had permeated the place!

"There's no need to talk about this 'ere little cut then, sir?"

"Not the least need."

"You'll be certifyin' 'im as having died of his leg, I don't doubt—as 'e really did?"

"That will undoubtedly go down on the certificate."

"We don't want no *hinqests*, do we, sir?" in a confidential whisper.

"No."

The man heaved a sigh of relief.

"You don't mind me asting all this, sir? I wasn't sure, beggin' your pardon, as you might say, if you was rather soft-like in these 'ere cases. He's better dead, pore chap, 'aint 'e?"

"Your logic is incontrovertible," said John, "I am just off to write to the coroner! Good-night."

CHAPTER XVI

THREE more days passed. Dr. Smith was buried. His will was read. Of relatives he had only a brother who had appeared at the inquest, and was also present at the reading. The dead man had bequeathed all his savings, some £4,000, to Eileen, "who had been a friend indeed in his affliction." The brother, who was wealthy, seemed in no wise put out, on the contrary he wrote a letter thanking Eileen sincerely for what she had done.

"For," said he, "my brother has told me how much he owed to you, and that he would never have been able to carry on his work without your help."

So Eileen and her sister, rendered independent by this stroke of fortune, put their heads together, and concocted a little plan.

John had begun to realize that if he would gain his ends it would be necessary to exercise more caution in his dealings with Alice, or he would frighten her away again as soon as she felt able to leave her sister. But he was quite unprepared for the next blow. To his astonishment and joy, Alice sent a note for him to come over and see her. Eileen was present when he arrived, still pale, but looking somewhat better than when he had last seen her. Alice was very kind and gentle, so much so that he grew suspicious. He listened to

her remarks anent Eileen's desire to leave a place possessing so many sad associations, and bided his time.

Presently it all came out. The two women had decided to leave the asylum at once, and take a cottage. John began to look black. Alice proceeded to emphasise the necessity of this for Eileen's sake, looking appealingly the while at John's darkening face.

"Of course," said he bitterly, "but let us have the whole truth. It is a fine opportunity to get away at once from me."

"You are right, John," said Eileen coldly, "And your conduct has given her every justification."

John bit his lip.

"Where is the cottage?" he asked. "Two hundred miles away?"

No, it appeared that the cottage was situated upon some land belonging to one of the few people whose friendship Dr. Smith and Eileen had cultivated, about ten miles off. The girls' idea was to settle there until Eileen had recovered her health and spirits sufficiently to make definite plans for the future.

John's face brightened a little at this. If they *were* to go, and Alice to leave the asylum, their plan had certain advantages from his point of view. It indefinitely postponed the fear that Alice might take a post in a distant asylum. The cottage would be handy, and he could easily visit her in the afternoons, especially as the question of the superintendentship would soon be settled. Then, perhaps,

it would be just as well for Alice not to be under the same roof as himself. For he quite understood that his renewed determination to overcome her moral scruples would need endless perseverance and patience, if it were to be effective, and to have her constantly under his eye did not tend toward the latter. He had resolved to control for the future the impetuous passion that had not in any way helped to achieve his end, and resort to guile.

He pretended more annoyance than he felt.

“A pretty little scheme,” he grumbled, “Alice might as well go into a nunnery and be done with it. But, of course, I don’t count. I can drudge on in this vile hole, with never a sight of her face to keep me from going straight to the devil. She wouldn’t care!”

The women were secretly very much relieved that John had not stormed and made a scene, as they had anticipated; but they did not show it.

“You are unreasonable, John,” said Alice gently. “You can manage to come over occasionally.”

“Just as I said! I shall be able to see you *occasionally*,” said he dismally. “It’s like giving a starving man a slice of bread-and-butter ‘occasionally.’”

Alice blushed, and her eyes softened. Eileen observed this.

“Now don’t be silly, both of you,” she said, “John shall come over two afternoons a week if he wishes, and is able to get off, provided, of course, that we are satisfied with his conduct.”

John ground his teeth.

“Very well, ladies,” said he, “It is your turn now. You can dictate your own terms. But do not try my patience too far. If on my ‘occasional’ visits I am to sit and look at Alice across a room, and converse about crops, chickens, and needle-work, well, look out for trouble, that’s all!”

And with this dire threat he took himself off.

The next day the women went to their cottage, leaving John, restless and miserable, to his monotonous round.

Two of the asylum committee visited the institution, and made a tour of inspection. Before they went they approved of the conditions that prevailed, for John had continued to conduct the place according to Dr. Smith’s regime, and informed him, with a smile, that the next meeting of the committee would be in ten days, when he might hope to be put out of his suspense.

As John re-entered the hall, after seeing them into their car, the hall-porter met him.

“The police station has just telephoned up, sir, and are holding on,” said he.

John went to the telephone.

“Hello,” said he, “I’m Dr. Fownes, of the asylum.”

“Ah, doctor, we’ve got the murderer of Dr. Smith,” came the reply.

“Have you, begad!”

“Yes, safe as houses. We’re sending him up to you. He’s as mad as a hatter, but so ill he can only just bear a journey to the asylum.”

“ I thought as much. Is he quiet ? ”

“ No, very restless and excited.”

“ How do you know it's the right man ? ”

“ Oh, we've got good evidence—the pistol and bullets, a thumb print in blood on one of the pennies, you remember, on the doctor's eyes ; the other half of the handkerchief round his head, we found there was only half of it there, the rest in our man's pocket. Be careful with him, doctor, he'll be tried for murder later. I'm sending up a reliable man with him.”

“ All right. I'm glad you've got him. When is he coming here ? ”

“ He'll be along in about twenty minutes, started before we rang you up.”

“ Thanks very much, good-bye.”

As he left the telephone, he met the chaplain coming into the asylum to do his round. John told him about the capture made by the police.

“ Poor wretch,” said the chaplain. “ Yet, I am curious to see him.”

“ Well, come and have tea with me to-day,” said John, “ and you shall see him after. We'll go and look at him together.”

“ Thanks, I will.”

He went about his work, and John returned to his room. He began a letter to Alice, but before he had half finished, the hall-porter appeared with the admission papers of the expected case. John put his letter in his pocket, and held out his hand for the order, etc. He glanced mechanically at them, then he stared wildly. He gasped, and

turned cold and sick. His head sank on his breast, and he sat in a stupor.

This is what had caught his eye.

“Order for the reception of a lunatic wandering at large—James Boyne—clergyman.”

Presently his mind resumed its activity, and began to work feverishly. “Boyne here, mad, and a murderer! No, not a murderer, it was a mistake—he had meant to shoot him, not Smith—but he would be tried for murder, and—his own part and Alice’s would come out. Was Boyne mad even, or only desperate? In any case the defence would be that Smith’s death was accidental, and the true facts would come to light. Alice’s name, though she was actually innocent, would be dragged in the mud of publicity. She would never look at him after it. Who would believe their presence in the same asylum coincidence? And himself? He would lose the superintendentship, and be an outcast.”

He read the certificate—

“He is confused, and does not know where he is nor what goes on around him. He is continually running about shouting and crying out without cause. He hears imaginary voices, and sees imaginary objects.”

“Then Boyne was delirious, and had apparently revealed nothing!” John set his teeth. “Perhaps Boyne never would!” Then he got up, and went down, with a face of marble, to the admission room.

Boyne was writhing feebly in the grip of two stalwart policemen, who held him by the wrists and shoulders. His clothes were muddy and torn,

his face grey and drawn, with a spot of hectic colour on each cheek. He was staring wildly about him, and muttering incoherently. He had rather the appearance of a man delirious from some virulent fever.

John observed him with a throb of joy. The man was evidently gravely ill, and might easily die. What a solution! Would to God he would! Acute confusional insanity, and starvation, were doing their work.

"Looks as if he 'adn't had much to eat lately," remarked one of the constables.

"Yes," said John, into whose mind a sinister thought had entered. "Looks very bad. A serious case indeed. I should not be at all surprised if he defeats the ends of justice yet."

He asked for a few particulars, and entered them on the admission paper. Boyne had been found that morning, wandering about the fields, half starved and delirious.

The patient was half led, half carried to the admission ward, stripped and examined for injuries. These were trifling. Then, as his crime was known to the attendants, a canvas shirt was put on him, and he was placed in a single-room with three strong rugs.

John, with throbbing brain, observed this without protest.

Boyne ran round the room, gesticulating, and shouting nonsense, every now and then he pushed at the door, kept closed by an attendant.

"Will you order any medicine, sir? We are

short handed to-day," said the charge attendant. This meant "Will you knock this restless troublesome patient over with drugs to save an attendant having to constantly watch him."

"I'll see," said John, with unaccustomed hesitation.

Then he went back to his room. His reading had told him that unless active remedial steps were taken, Boyne would die in a few days, on the other hand, if he lived he would, in all probability, completely recover his reason. And then?

An idea which had been germinating since his first sight of Boyne in the admission room, rushed over him like a flood. "Why should he act? Why not let well alone? Why interfere with the course of destiny? It would be quite easy to remain passive, to refrain from stretching out a hand to save Boyne. It was no more than he had witnessed in other cases. Why not apply the system of *laissez-faire*, prevalent here, to this case? A little neglect, imperceptible to non-medical eyes, a little 'economy' and withholding of needful nourishment and treatment, and the thing was done." Another thought came "Why not be consistent, and carry out the other cherished method of the place. Why not *drug* Boyne?" But, he reflected, that, in Boyne's state would be akin to murder. But the other idea, to simply allow him to die, that was different. Was it?"

John got up and paced the room. His forehead and hands were damp with sweat. He alternately drew deep breaths, and bit his lip savagely,

“ Under many A.M.O.’s Boyne would have died, for knowledge of appropriate treatment was uncommon among them. A great number of men would have simply dubbed the case ‘mania,’ and poured in sedatives, with a fatal issue. Why should he be the loser by his greater knowledge? ”

He cursed the day he studied his book on insanity. “ What a double-dyed fool he had been! Smith had had sense, he had told him he’d pick up all he needed by doing the work. Then he could not have been—guilty. Guilty! Of what? ”

The room seemed too small for him, he could not breathe in it. He went outside to cool his burning head in the air. He walked up and down the drive.

“ Why not, why not? ” rang through his mind. Then he tried to reason calmly. On the one hand were the public disgrace of the woman he loved, their eternal separation, his own shame and loss of the superintendentship, nay his dismissal, his mother’s anguish at his conduct and dishonour. These would result if Boyne lived.

On the other side, Alice to wife, an end to his life of heart sickening monotony and unsatisfied love, the superintendentship of the asylum. All these if Boyne died.

“ Why not? ” Misery, ignominy and poverty, if he acted, love, happiness, honour and wealth, if he stayed his hand!

“ A crime? Nonsense! A little negligence, that was all! ” The beating of his heart nearly suffocated him. He made his choice. Environment had triumphed.

He went up to his room again, but not to rest. His thoughts ran on unbidden, irrepressible, and tormented him by their repetition. But they were not quite so clear now, the concentration upon one train of ideas had deadened their meaning. "Even if he had used his best endeavours Boyne might have died," he thought. "Who would be the worse for his death? On the contrary, two persons would be rescued from a life of misery or sin, and another, his mother, from shame for her only son. Boyne's death would save them from these; who was it he had recently heard about, whose death saved somebody? Ah, the chaplain's talk. Strange that should recur to his mind, and now of all times?" He nearly laughed at the incongruity.

"What rot! a superstitious tradition fit only for children." He banished the thought. "But the chaplain was no child. What would he think of his—murder?" (the word was involuntarily uttered by his mind). "Murder! how absurd! Simply inaction. Why he couldn't have saved Boyne himself a couple of months back. But," persisted the thought, "what would the chaplain think of his er—inaction? What the devil did it matter what the chaplain would have thought, he'd never know." But he knew what he would think of his conduct, if he knew, however it were called. "He could just picture the dismay, and the condemnation in no measured terms." Then like a flash came back, "Now, therefore, there is no *condemnation* for them that are in Christ Jesus."

"Damnation!" he said aloud, "Why does all

this canting humbug return to my mind now? Curse the chaplain, and all his blasted rubbish!"

"Boyne must take his chance. That he had settled, and it was done with. Was it?" Back came all the old arguments, accompanied by an awful sense of impotent struggling.

Presently Rose brought in his tea. He hardly noticed her. Then came the chaplain, according to his appointment.

"Why, Fownes!" he exclaimed, "What is the matter? You look awfully b-bad and worried."

"Worried! the fool!" thought John. Then an idea suddenly struck him. "The chaplain would, of course, learn Boyne's name and calling, and he himself had told his friend about Alice's husband. The doubly-dyed fool that he was! If he said nothing about it now when the chaplain had stayed up at the asylum expressly to see and talk about Smith's murderer, when Boyne died what would his friend think? It would be suspicious. He must tell him."

"I *am* worried," he said in a thick voice. "The murderer of Dr. Smith, who has just been admitted, is the husband of the woman I love."

The chaplain looked at him in wonder, and remained silent, in thought.

"He is extremely ill," went on John, "and not at all unlikely to die."

He avoided the chaplain's eye.

The latter seemed to see light. He spoke gravely.

"I can well understand how anxious you m-must be in having him under your care, lest inadvertently

you should m-make a mistake, or leave anything undone that might s-save him. It would be a dreadful thing for you, b-but do not worry, old chap, just do your utmost, and l-leave it to—God.”

“ A dreadful thing to make a mistake ! ” John stared fiercely, almost wildly, at his friend.

“ I b-beg your pardon,” said the other. “ Have I said anything t-to offend you ? I am very—” Then he stopped, and his eyes caught the reflection of the growing horror in John’s.

They looked into each other’s faces, as pale as ghosts. Then John made a violent effort to shake himself free mentally from the chaplain’s influence. His face hardened, but his gaze fell.

“ Why do you look at me like that ? ” he said, almost savagely. But it was a failure, and the sweat broke out on his forehead. His friend’s gaze seemed to burn into him, stern and accusing. He shrank from it, but his temptation held him fast. He *could* not give it up. “ Why must he struggle again ? Struggle ! It was agony ! ” He shook from head to foot with the violence of the mental conflict. “ Yet to turn back ? ” His mind went feverishly over the old arguments with a fearful eagerness.

The other watched him.

“ God save us from temptation,” he said solemnly. “ From blood-guiltiness ! ”

John started violently, and buried his face in his hands.

There was a pause. Then the chaplain began in a low voice of inexpressible sweetness.

“ ‘Come unto Me all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.’ ”

“ Rest! Rest from the weary hopelessness his life had bred in him, from the petty wearing struggle against the system of the place, from the desperation of his thwarted love, from the awful conflict that now rent his soul? Rest, oh, sweet and all embracing word!” It did not occur to John to question the authority of the speaker, the words themselves were immortal. “ But what could He know of agony like his? He was said to have been Divine, and knew not human love, nor temptation such as this. But Rest!” “ Could he have understood my position and given me rest?” he muttered unconsciously aloud.

But his friend caught the mumbled words, and replied in a clarion voice,

“ Could? Can, will! listen, ‘ He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief . . . but He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.’ ”

Then, extending his arms, with a world of entreaty in his voice.

“ Fownes,” he said, “ Shall that be wasted? It was for you.”

Then he fell on his knees and prayed aloud. But John did not hear him, but sat on with a look of wonder, awe, and timid joy in his eyes. What passed in his mind I do not know, but he rose from

his chair when the chaplain ceased praying, an altered man. His friend looked at him, and saw in his eyes a light he knew of old. John grasped his hand, and went out.

“ Rubbish ! Fables ! Myths ! ” scoffs a sceptical reader.

Well, well.

But consider. If belief in in a fable saves a man from murder, drunkenness, and vice ; if it gives him peace, courage, and a motive to help his fellow men ; if it actuates all the philanthropic efforts in the most highly civilised lands ; if it is the root cause of the progress of those countries by mitigating the ruthlessness of nature’s laws of evolution, and thus producing the highest type of a civilised race the world has ever seen ?—and these things are indisputable—is it not a good thing to believe in that fable ? Can it *be* a fable ?

CHAPTER XVII

It must not be imagined that John had been suddenly transformed into a saint, nor even into that objectionable product of cant and egotism—"a good young man." Nothing of the kind.

But his desperate impatience, his miserable recklessness, and his heart-sick longing, had gone; his temptation was conquered, and a strange peace pervaded him. Bitterness and hate no longer possessed his mind, his heart was softened. He was sincerely grateful in the right quarter for this change, and for his deliverance. He had simply turned round, and instead of desiring to roll downward to adultery and crime, he nourished a firm resolve to climb upward, and become worthy of the name of a Christian gentleman. But stay, "Christian" is redundant; the noun embraces the adjective.

It is not within the scope of this book to follow in its progress towards this goal a heart disciplined of God. But it is necessary to relate sundry incidents and happenings that occurred after John's *volte-face*.

When he left his room he turned his steps straight to the admission ward. Since John last saw him, a couple of hours ago, Boyne had grown too weak to walk, or even to crawl. The doctor found him lying in a heap on the floor of his single-room. He

had refused all food since his admission. John fed him by means of the stomach-tube with concentrated nourishment and needful stimulants. He caused him to be wrapped in hot blankets, deputed a special attendant to watch him, and otherwise did what was necessary. And Boyne began to mend from that hour.

This was the beginning of John's work in the asylum. In the evening he wrote to Alice. Undoubtedly a saint would have incontinently broken off all communication with her, in spite of a great love, a "good young man" would never have been capable of feeling the latter. But, as I have said, John was as yet neither. He wrote expressing his unchangeable affection, but said that, at present, he could not clearly see his way how they must act for the future, and, in the meantime, things must remain *in statu quo*, and, would she write to him soon? He put no more than this in his letter, nothing about Boyne, for he felt he must see her to tell her that.

It would weary the reader if I were to enumerate all the changes in the asylum John wrought in a week. Briefly put, he reversed Dr. Smith's policy. Among other things, nine-tenths of the sedatives were discontinued, the coarse strong rugs and shirts were practically abolished, and beds (i.e., mattresses and bedding) were distributed with a lavish hand. "Extras," milk, eggs, etc., were served out to all patients needing them, and appropriate medical treatment was ordered just as if the patients had been sane!

But other changes he could not bring about without the consent of the Committee. For example, he was unable to build balconies, to have a continuous hot bath installed, to abolish the old system of heating (?). He could not build padded rooms, ventilate single-rooms, improve the general dietary, nor discharge or increase the staff of the asylum.

But he did what he could in a week and unaided. At the expiration of this strenuous period the asylum committee met. Before the actual assembly John conducted the chairman and another over the institution. The place was more noisy than formerly, owing to the sudden limitation of sedatives. But it was a miscellaneous noise, the patients chattered, a few were "troublesome" (that is to say, they needed actual attendance from the attendants in contra-distinction to mere staring at), and a number were actually laughing! Then the patients were better clad. Old badly-fitting or patched clothes had been discarded, and new ones issued. The gentlemen of the committee noticed these changes, and were surprised. They shook their heads.

They found "destructive" patients enjoying the luxury of beds, which, curiously enough, they were not rending into tatters. They discovered far more sick patients in bed, and these with temperature and pulse charts allotted to them. And the gentlemen were more surprised, and shook their heads a second time.

As it happened to be the dinner hour, the chairman and his colleague could not fail to observe a considerable number of patients consuming

“ extras ” with great gusto. Then, to increase their amazement, they were led into a ward and dormitory devoted entirely to consumptive patients (for to such number had these grown), and dreadful to relate, each of these was imbibing a pint of milk, in addition to the prescribed diet ! But the climax was reached when the chairman found the rarely occupied isolation block cleaned, garnished, and staffed, and occupied by patients suffering from the scourge of asylums, colitis, or asylum dysentery, and all on a milk diet !

The two gentlemen of the committee went down after their round of inspection. They asked John to wait awhile, as they wished to consult the clerk and steward upon a few points. They straightway caused these functionaries to calculate the amount of extras, the number of clothes and boots, served out during John’s supremacy, and to compare the results with the average during a similar period under Dr. Smith’s regime. A like reckoning was completed touching the issue of drugs. Then they finally obtained a comparison of the maintenance rates under the two systems.

They accomplished all this in half-an-hour, while John was doing a tuberculin test upon a doubtful phthisic. Then they went up and communicated the results of their inspection, and the clerk’s arithmetic, to their colleagues. Then they sent for John.

“ We are afraid, doctor,” began the chairman, not unkindly, “ that your methods are rather too revolutionary. We are the last to wish to curtail

necessary expenditure, but we cannot believe the changes you have wrought are necessary."

John bowed, and waited.

"We find," the other continued with more emphasis, "that the articles served out during your deputy superintendentship are more than double those Dr. Smith was accustomed to issue in the same period."

John held his peace.

"The food, clothing, and even drug bill, is greatly in excess," went on the chairman severely, beginning to understand John's silence. "And you will easily understand that such, ah—extravagance will raise the maintenance rate much above what it has formerly been. Now, doctor, the committee are agreed that the County Council will not at all approve of this."

"You are quite right, sir," said John quietly.

"Then I must say," went on the other impressively, "that we found the place more turbulent, more patients in bed, and the staff harassed by the overwork involved by your ward of consumptives, and by the opening of the isolation hospital. You must understand that an asylum cannot be conducted upon the lines of a hospital."

Then John expressed his views as succinctly as possible upon asylum management. The reader must take them for granted, and will be able to supply them himself from what he has read above.

The committee listened with an air of ennui, and when he had finished the chairman continued his harangue.

“ We consider your management of the asylum,” he said dryly, “ to be unsuitable and quixotic, and entirely upon the wrong lines. Now, as you are aware, the post of superintendent is vacant, and some of us had—er—hopes of appointing you to it, but under the circumstances—the committee are with me in this—unless you can see your way to conduct the institution more upon the lines laid down by the late Dr. Smith, we feel that we should not be doing our duty to the Council if we nominated you.”

“ Now, come, doctor,” he added in a patronizing tone, “ you have heard us, what do you say ? ”

“ I should like to be quite clear about it,” said John deliberately, “ I take it the position in a nutshell is this : unless I agree to keep the maintenance rate—and without juggling with it—somewhere near Dr. Smith’s starvation figure, namely 9s. 1d., I shall not be appointed to the superintendentship. If I do, I shall.”

The committee exchanged glances. The chairman coloured with annoyance.

“ Yes,” he replied coldly, “ and the condition of the asylum quite satisfied us under that rate, an amply sufficient one, if aided by skilful management.”

“ Well, gentlemen,” said John, “ I thank you, but I can agree to no such thing. To my mind, Dr. Smith’s system is in the last degree pernicious.”

“ That will do, Dr. Fownes, thank you,” said the chairman ; “ your frankness is, at all events, useful. Our course is clear. We propose to advertise at

once for a medical superintendent, but we should wish you to remain here in charge until we obtain a suitable man. We should also desire you to return to Dr. Smith's regime, and to initiate the incoming superintendent into his methods."

John laughed sardonically. He saw it was hopeless to argue further.

"I shall stay here, as you desire, gentlemen," he said, "because I have charged myself with the recovery of, er—certain patients. But I shall not return to Dr. Smith's regime. As for putting the new man into his ways, that I decline to do. On the contrary, without any personal disrespect, I hope you will get a man who will do his duty in spite of you, gentlemen, and your policy of economy—a bad policy, which results in the needless death of patients, and the manufacture of dements."

The chairman turned purple with anger. But John had the whip hand of them, they could not dismiss him off hand, and thus leave the asylum doctorless.

"What an absurdity," he sneered, "A novice like yourself trying to teach us our duty, and criticising the routine of an experienced man like Dr. Smith! I am afraid, doctor, you are rather a visionary. However, you will not have much time to indulge your pet theories; probably a couple of weeks will see a new medical superintendent installed. Good morning, doctor."

Then John played what he had imagined to be his trump card, but now with much less confidence. A card which after much thought and many mis-

givings, he had decided it was his duty to produce, if other means failed to convince the committee. Prefacing his remarks with the statement that he desired to bring no charge against a man whom the hand of death had prevented from replying, and laying the blame at the door of the system, he related to the committee what he knew concerning some of the specific tragedies that had occurred in the place during his tenure of the post of A.M.O.

He told them of the illegitimate still-birth, of the deaths from exposure, sedatives, starvation, phthisis, and medical treatment withheld ; of the man who died from broken ribs ; of the misery of the patients, and the demoralising effects on the staff. He cited the recent inquest (which had duly been held) on the tuberculous suicide as an example of the result of surgical inactivity—

“ And this system the root cause of all these tragedies, is the regime you uphold.” he concluded.

There was a short pause, then the chairman asked coldly—“ Can you produce any evidence, Dr. Fownes, in support of this remarkable *ex parte* statement ? ”

John was silent. What evidence had he ? Not a soul in the place would confirm a word he said even if they could. Beyond that the patients were dead he had no facts to produce. Perhaps he had been a fool to speak, after seeing the attitude of the committee. But he had felt he must.

“ Apparently not,” continued the chairman with satisfaction. “ I should have been surprised if you could, or why did you not report these matters to us

when they occurred during Dr. Smith's lifetime?"

"I have told you these things, gentlemen," said John, "reluctantly, and because I felt it my duty. I am sorry but not surprised now that you do not believe them. Such things seldom gain official credence. I give you credit for honest scepticism, whether justly or unjustly is known to yourselves. I have no evidence, as you say; I had none at the time. Had I any then, had it been possible to obtain sworn testimony, yet I think I should have held my peace, for the man ostensibly responsible (but mind, gentlemen, no more so in reality than yourselves), my colleague, would have been ruined, perhaps imprisoned. It has been a painful task to me to speak upon these matters to-day, but as a last appeal and at the risk of the accusation of maligning the dead, for the sake of all the poor wretches in whatever capacity living in asylums of this type, I had to speak."

Strange talk from careless John Fownes?

Pardon a quotation, reader—

" by being brought into His presence one becomes something." (De Profundis).

And the committee, how did they receive this earnest appeal? Listen—

"That is quite sufficient, Dr. Fownes, you are unable to produce a particle of evidence to substantiate these frivolous charges. The committee is surprised that you have thought fit to advance them. No more remains to be said. Good morning."

Oh, the impenetrable armour of officialdom, ignorance and prejudice !

John left the room quite unmoved, and wrote straightway to a medical agent for an assistantship.

A week passed, and James Boyne recovered rapidly. In ten days he recognised John. He began to wonder where he was, how John was there, and why he devoted so much time and attention to him. A few days later his mind, with one exception, was completely restored, but he was still extremely weak physically. The remaining mental defect was mnemonic. He had no recollection of anything at all subsequent to his visit to Dr. Rogers, and only hazy mental pictures of the events succeeding his fit upon the night he discovered John's love for his wife.

John's position with relation to Boyne was a difficult one. He had announced that any attendant who mentioned the shooting of Dr. Smith in Boyne's hearing would be dismissed at once. This, of course, was an idle threat, but the staff was ignorant of that.

The clergyman's attitude towards John was at first marked by a feeble resentment, but after several conversations with the Doctor, his feelings underwent an entire change. He became convinced that there had been no harm between his wife and John, and his old liking for the latter revived. This was in no small degree brought about by the unremitting and self-effacing care he received at John's hands. They became accustomed to talk fairly freely, but certain matters John, for the present, withheld

from the clergyman. Firstly, the murder; then, the fact that they were in an asylum (Boyne imagined it was a sort of nursing home or hospital in London, where John held a post), and also Alice's past movements and present proximity. He told Boyne that his wife was with her sister in Northshire.

The clergyman was eager to see and make amends to Alice, and John, hardly knowing whether he meant it or not, promised to persuade her to see her husband later, when he became strong enough to bear the interview. And Boyne was content with that. If their conversation showed any remote possibility of touching upon the topics prohibited in John's mind, a "Now don't you bother about that now, all in good time," from him satisfied the other, who had grown to repose implicit faith in him.

But it was anxious work, even postponing the inevitable in this manner, and John dreaded the time when he must break the news of Boyne's unconscious crime to him. The clergyman's anguish and remorse would be terrible. He had often of late expressed to John his great sorrow for the vindictive feelings he had formerly cherished towards him.

John was unable to leave the asylum to tell Alice of her husband's presence, and he was resolved only to do so orally, but it worried him a good deal. He was destined, however, to be compelled to find other means of imparting it to her, for, just as Boyne began to gain a little weight, he was struck down by that fell scourge of asylums—dysentery.

When John discovered this, his heart died within

him. Attacking one already so debilitated, the disease was bound to prove fatal. John wired to the best specialist in London, and wrote off at once to the superintendent of an asylum where attempts were made to combat the pestilence scientifically. Both these gentlemen came, looked at Boyne, and shook their heads.

John was at his wits end what to do for the best. Eventually he wrote a letter to Eileen, asking her to bring Alice over at once to see her husband. He told her all the facts of the case, and said she might either reveal them herself to Alice, or leave him to do so on her arrival.

The two women came the next day. Eileen had told Alice everything except Boyne's murder of Dr. Smith. John went up to prepare the clergyman for the interview with his wife.

James Boyne, who had gathered from John's distress and anxiety that his days were numbered, received Alice with a quiet affection that melted her heart, and bowed her spirit to the ground. He asked her forgiveness for his suspicion and former lack of kindness and appreciation. He listened to her sobbing self-reproaches with that detached pity and clear understanding which marks the loosening of the bonds that hold men to this world. He denied that she was to blame, and comforted her.

Before he died, the clergyman again expressed to John his sorrow for the malice and hate he formerly bore him. Then John told him of his temptation, and asked his forgiveness.

"My friend," said the clergyman, with a gentle

smile, "It is no more than I wished to do to you. We are quits. The Lord has dealt very mercifully with our stubborn hearts, both the sinners and the pharisee's the greater sinner."

A few days later James Boyne died.

Eileen and Alice, drawn closer together than ever by this new trouble, returned to their cottage. Alice had seen but little of John since Eileen had brought her to visit her husband. A feeling of delicacy, and perhaps shame, had caused her to keep out of his way, and he had tacitly acquiesced.

In the course of a few days, another superintendent was duly appointed, and John set off to take up a new assistantship in the neighbourhood of London. His one regret in leaving the asylum was to part with the chaplain. The latter saw him off, with many good wishes, and promises to write.

"But yourself," said John, "Are you going to stop in this den?"

"Until I am dismissed" replied his friend with a smile. "I think for the p-present my work l-lies here. I must try to do a little to remove the d-disabilities under which you have t-told me the patients live." For John, since Dr. Smith's death, had told his friend something of the iniquity of the asylum system.

"You'll get sacked all right, you can take it from me!"

"Then I m-must go elsewhere. It matters not where, greatly."

"And Eileen?" said John diffidently.

The chaplain's bright face clouded a moment, then broke into a tender smile.

"I have spoken to her," he said simply. "I had s-stupidly hoped too much, that she m-might at some time have consented to marry me, b-but her refusal was irrevocable. God's will be done."

This, then, was his consolation, that she had ceased to live in sin.

Such were his joys in this world, and perhaps his crown in the next.

CHAPTER XVIII

OLD Mr. Strong, after his downfall, had gradually risen from a farm-bailiff to renting a small farm. The latter was just sufficient, with the aid of monies received from Eileen, to support his wife and himself in comfort, and the old gentleman worked in his fields, holding up his head as high as ever.

Then suddenly, to the surprise of the countryside, he bought freehold, and stocked one of the largest and oldest farms in the vicinity. It had formerly been a Manor House, and, indeed, in the remote past, had belonged to one of his own ancestors.

This evidence of mysterious wealth dumbfounded the Squire, but though they held no communications with each other, years had softened the animosity existing between the two old men, and Mr. Dayncourt was not sorry to see his erstwhile victim recovered from the results of his own past harshness. For age had somewhat mellowed the squire. It had done more ; years had broken his health. Eileen never corresponded with her father, and Alice, after receiving no reply to several letters from Rudford, had ceased to write. It will be remembered that Mr. Boyne had been in communication with Mr. Dayncourt after Alice's disappearance. The solitary old man began to pine for his absent daughters.

Then a day came when he was laid aside by a cerebral hæmorrhage. The local practitioner was

hastily called in, but when he had done all that was humanly possible, in fact, pulled the old gentleman out of the jaws of death, the latter insisted upon sending for Dr. Rogers.

Our old friend came down with alacrity, and in return for a handsome fee, looked very wise. Mr. Dayncourt, however, though comforted by Roger's presence, conceived the idea that he was about to die. The estrangement between his daughters and himself weighed heavily upon his heart. He was aware, from Alice's letters, of their locality, but greatly fearing a rebuff, he hesitated to write. He confided his grief to Dr. Rogers. The latter, genuinely glad that his patient was disposed to a reconciliation with his daughters, listened to his description of their pursuits, and whereabouts, with his tongue in his cheek. Then he volunteered to write for the squire. This offer was eagerly accepted, and in due course, Eileen received a letter, forwarded from the asylum, telling her of her father's illness.

Dr. Rogers had painted the case in rather darker colours than accorded with his actual opinion, but, as events transpired, it proved to be a fortunate exaggeration. Eileen and Alice returned to their father's home, but before their arrival the squire had suffered another stroke. He rallied a little afterwards, recognised, and blessed his daughters by signs, but he never spoke again.

He lived three weeks after this. The sisters nursed him with assiduous care, one of them always being at his bedside. The brunt of the nursing fell

upon Eileen, who, indeed, never went out except into the park surrounding the house, until the old squire died.

But a week after her return home she caused enquiries to be made concerning the Strong's. She was informed of their newly-found prosperity, and the purchase of the farm. She was filled with a dismay akin to terror, for she knew that their good fortune could only proceed from one source. Her husband must be alive, and wealthy! Perhaps he would even return, or send for her to join him somewhere. Never! She shrank in horror at the thought, but the repugnance was for herself, not for him.

After the squire's death, except for walks along unfrequented lanes, she shut herself up, and was at home to nobody. She knew that she ought to call and see Mr. and Mrs. Strong, and that they would be offended at her neglect, but she dared not face them. She feared they would attribute her continued absence to pride, for she was now a great lady, but shame kept her away. She had inherited large landed possessions, the family seat, and a very handsome income. Alice's share was twenty thousand pounds in cash, and in the event of Eileen's death, half the property, the other half to go to Eileen's heirs, and failing these, to revert to Alice.

Eileen lived in daily terror of news from her husband. She set further enquiries on foot anent his return, but nothing was known in the village. But her anxiety gave her no peace, and finally, overcame her fear and shame of meeting her parents-in-

law. She determined to pay them a visit, and if she found that he was returning home, or still thought of her, she would leave the district at once.

Was her old love for him, then, entirely dead? Who should know? Who can read a woman's heart? She had thought so, but somehow, since her return home, incidents and scenes of her courtship would continually return to her mind. They pictured him in the familiar surroundings as he had been in those far-off days, and only served to increase her distress. How he had loved her! And she, what account could she render of the years since he had left her? Her one fervent prayer was this, that he might have formed other ties, and might leave her in peace.

So she took her courage in both hands, and paid a visit to the Strongs. The old people, though fond of her and grateful, were prepared to treat her with coldness after her recent neglect, but they were melted by her humble speech and saddened aspect. Indeed, she appeared a different woman to the self-willed, high-spirited girl they had known. But they were not frank with her, though they greeted her eagerly and with an air of suppressed excitement.

She questioned them cautiously about her husband, but they were mysterious, and reticent. They watched her keenly. However, they admitted that he had written them from America a month ago, and enclosed a considerable sum of money. Indeed, they informed her, they had received letters from him now for five years.

“ Why had they never told her about him ? ”

He had laid a positive command upon them to tell her nothing until he gave permission, but they were to keep him informed, as far as possible, of her movements.

Eileen turned pale, and shivered. Then she asked, "Why, then, did they tell her now?"

Then the simple old things were caught, and the truth came out. Dick had made a comfortable fortune in British Columbia, and was expected home soon. The old couple watched her eagerly as she listened. The only change they saw was an increasing pallor. Not a shade of pleasure crossed the marble face of the woman before them. Their disappointment was keen for their son.

"When do you expect him home?" Eileen asked in a level voice of despair. But Mr. Strong was deeply hurt and angry at her fancied indifference, and would not tell her. "He would let her know when his son returned."

So she left them, with a fixed determination in her mind. That was to leave Alice in possession of the old house, and go away at once; it mattered little where, anything but to meet her husband.

As she walked home through the familiar roads, she conceived a horror of herself. Her conduct and life at Rudford seemed a monstrous nightmare. She saw no palliation in the necessity of earning money to send the Strong's. Could it be possible that the girl who used to ride and walk, and gather flowers in this lane, was an impure woman? How she remembered the familiar windings of it, the little stone bridge over the mill-stream,

the clump of bramble where the finest blackberries grew. There was the pathway across the fields where she had been wont secretly to meet Dick before her marriage, the Dick she had first known, tall, bronzed and bright-eyed—a young god. Her tears blinded her, as she thought of what he had become in a few short months of their marriage—a haggard, yet bloated and furtive man. Could it be possible? Was not that also a bad dream like her intervening past?

Everything reminded her of innocent bygone days, and, as she wandered home, the fear and remorse left her heart. So she dreamed on, recognising, with a thrill of exquisite pain and joy, each well remembered spot. Here, on the left, was part of the Strong's old farm; she had often seen Dick ploughing there. There, was the stile on which he had been wont to sit and chew his straw in meditation, and where she had first really made his acquaintance.

What a pity! there was someone sitting on it. The presence of an actual person put to flight her sweetly sad musings, and her mind returned to reality with a sickening shock. The horror of her past, and terror of her husband returned with redoubled force. She must get home, hide herself; and prepare to leave immediately. Then the someone on the stile turned round, and in a flash she had crossed the intervening space, and was in his arms! But then it must be confessed that he had also run to meet her.

Dick Strong, looking like himself before his

marriage, but for some grey hairs, and many lines in his honest face, forgave his wife her real sin for the same reason that James Boyne pardoned his wife her imaginary one. But Dick's love was at the other end of the scale. He insisted that he was primarily to blame. And so this couple, after much tribulation, settled down, with a grateful joy in their hearts, to domestic tranquility and peace.

And what of John ?

He came down to spend occasional week-ends with the new squire, his wife, and sister-in-law. He treated Alice with a quiet almost brotherly affection, and respect, that annoyed her excessively.

At first she attributed his manner to a feeling of delicacy connected with Boyne's recent death. But months went by, and his attitude remained unchanged, indeed, she thought she observed a disposition on his part to avoid duologues with herself. Then she began to understand the reason, and lost all patience with him. She asked him plump one day, when she had succeeded in getting him to herself, why he was not the same to her as he used to be.

" Things are different," he replied evasively.

" They are," she agreed—" for the better, but you go on as if a barrier had been raised between us, instead of one removed. I don't believe you love me now you can—" she stopped abruptly.

" You know that's a lie!" here spoke the old John.

She smiled. Then he hastened to add,

“ I beg your pardon, Alice. I had no right to say that.”

She pouted. Then as sweet as honey, and dropping her lids seductively—

“ Don't you want to marry me, John, dear ? ” she cooed.

“ You little siren ! Stop your games ! ”

“ I believe you only wanted me before because you could not get me ! ” with sudden indignation. “ And now there is no impediment you have lost interest in the chase. That's men all over ! ”

“ If you talk to me like that I shall kiss you ! ” The silly fellow actually forgot that this was now rather an inducement than a threat.

“ You dare ! ”

Then, of course, he did. Then he remembered that there was no reason on earth why he shouldn't, so he went on kissing her until she escaped, flushed and breathless. Then she said,

“ *Now*, I suppose you *will* propose to me ! No gentleman could behave so to a lady else ! ”

“ I wonder why I've never kissed you before like that,” remarked John musingly.

“ Before ? I should think not indeed ! ”

“ But I have, you know,” persisted John, “ Yet it was quite different.”

“ Ah, but then, I wasn't willing before, you see,” observed a small voice to the fireplace.

“ Oh ! you are willing now, are you ? ”

“ Yes, dear,” demurely eyeing her shoe.

“ Then you are a minx, and have got some ulterior motive ! ”

“ What do you mean, sir ? ” with an appearance of great indignation.

“ I repeat, you are a siren, and are bent on seducing a poor captive wretch from what he thinks is his duty.”

“ There ! I knew we should get at it soon. And in what way do I interfere with your duty, sir ? ”

“ You make me love you too much to live in peace without you.”

“ Then why should you ? ”

“ My dear, you spoke of barriers just now. There is one now between us that I do not see how I can remove for years.”

Her eyes sparkled ominously.

“ Yes, the old story—just like a novel—your pride ! ”

“ Like a novel or not, it's not my pride, but my beastly poverty,” and he really imagined them two different things.

“ John, will you marry me ? ” in a decisive voice.

“ Heaven knows it is my dearest hope to, ultimately, but on £160 a year indoors, and you worth thousands ! ”

“ John, will you marry me next month ? ” with a hint of tears.

“ My dear girl, do be reasonable——”

“ I wont. I don't w-want to be reasonable, I want t-to be *dear*, and if I was to you, you'd *want* to m-marry me, instead of having to be implored——” and suddenly waking up to the enormity of it all—
“ I never heard of a woman having to do such a thing in my life ! I won't say another word ! ”

Then she immediately added, in a wheedling voice.

“ I’ll lend you some money to buy old Podham’s practice here, if you’ll let me. Do, there’s a dear ! He wants to sell it.”

“ Does he ? ” said John eagerly, “ I wonder if he’d take the money by instalments out of it. It’s worth £800 a year to him.”

“ Yes, he would ! I-I mean I am sure he would not be so unkind as to refuse,” fearful lest she should give away a little plan that had suddenly occurred to her, namely, to pay “ old Podham ” out, without John’s knowledge, and let his instalments return per old Podham to her, and hence to John.

John smiled.

“ It might be done, my dear, and then ? Let me see,” he added with sparkling eyes, “ Didn’t you make some brazen remark just now about being willing to be kissed ? ”

“ No, I never did ! ” she said shamelessly, and made a dart for the door.

THE END

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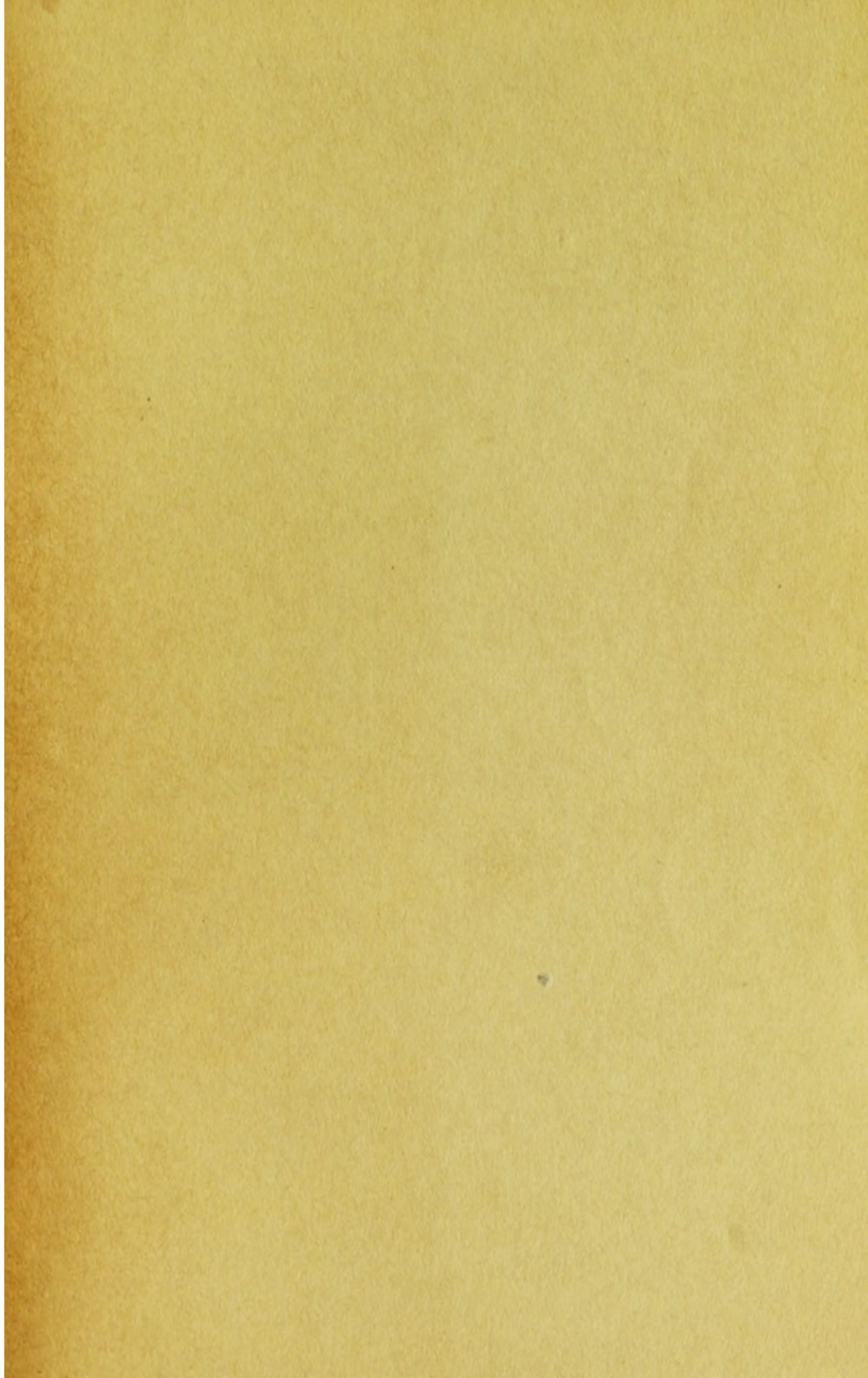
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