

Stories from the Diary of a Doctor.

By the Author of "THE MEDICINE LADY."

I.—MY FIRST PATIENT.

BY a strange coincidence I was busily engaged studying a chapter on neurotic poisons in Taylor's "Practice of Medical Jurisprudence," when a knock came to my door, and my landlady's daughter entered and handed me a note.

"The messenger is waiting, sir," she said. "He has just come over from the hospital, and he wants to know if there is any answer."

I had just completed my year as house physician at St. Saviour's Hospital, East London, and was now occupying lodgings not two minutes off.

I opened the note hastily—it contained a few words:—

"MY DEAR HALIFAX,—Come over at once, if you can. You will find me in B Ward. I have just heard of something which I think will suit you exactly.—Yours, JOHN RAY."

"Tell the messenger I will attend to this immediately," I said to the girl.

She withdrew, and putting the note into my pocket I quickly slipped into my great-coat, for the night was a bitterly cold one, and ran across to St. Saviour's.

Ray was the resident surgeon. During my time at the hospital we had always been special friends. I found him, as usual, at his post. He was in the surgical ward, busily engaged setting a broken leg, when I put in an appearance.

"I'll speak to you in one moment, Halifax," he said; "just hand me that bandage, there's a good fellow. Now then, my dear boy," he continued, bending over his patient, a lad of fourteen, "you will soon be much easier. Where is the nurse? Nurse, I shall look in again later, and inject a little morphia before we settle him for the night. Now then, Halifax, come into the corridor with me."

"What do you want me for?" I asked, as I stood by his side in the long corridor which ran from east to west across the great hospital, and into which all the wards on the first floor opened. "Why this sudden message; what can I do to help you, Ray?"

"You have not made up your mind as to your future?" answered Ray.

"Not quite," I replied. "I may buy a practice, or try to work my way up as a specialist—I have a leaning towards the latter course; but there is no special hurry anyway."

"You are not averse to a job in the meantime, I presume?"

"That depends upon what it is," I answered.

"Well, see here. I have just had a frantic telegram from a man in the country. His name



"SHE HANDED ME A NOTE."

is Ogilvie—I used to know him years ago, but have lost sight of him lately. His telegram recalls him to my memory—he is a clever fellow, and bought himself a large practice at a place called Saltmarsh. He has wired to ask if I can send him a *locum tenens* in a great hurry. This is what he says.”

Ray began to read from the telegram :—

“‘Wife ill—can’t attend to practice. Send someone with brains in his head down to-night, if possible.’

“There, Halifax. Put this in your pocket if you mean to attend to it. You have nothing special to do just now. Will you go?”

“How far off is Saltmarsh?” I asked.

“I have an ‘ABC’ in my room; come and we’ll look the place up.”

Ray pulled me along with him. We entered his rooms at the corner of the wing, and the next moment had ascertained that it would be possible to reach Saltmarsh by the Great Eastern line in two hours and a half.

“Will you go?” he asked, “it may be an opening for you. In your state of indecision, it is well to take any chance of seeing medical life. Ogilvie will probably only require your services for two or three days, and—in short—”

“It would oblige you if I went?” I interrupted. “That settles the matter.”

“No, no. You must not labour under a false impression. Ogilvie was never a friend of mine; I just knew him in the ordinary course, and never took to him in any special way. Will you go, Halifax, just for the chance of seeing life, and helping some poor beggars in the country? If you say no, I must cudgel my brains for someone else, and there is no time to be lost.”

I looked at the telegram again.

“Yes, I will go,” I said. “I can catch the nine train from Liverpool Street without difficulty. This will bring me to Saltmarsh at 11.45. Will you wire to Ogilvie, or shall I do so, Ray?”

“I’ll take that trouble off your hands, my dear fellow. I am awfully obliged. Now then, good night, and good luck. Look me up when you return.”

Ray rushed back to his ward, and I went to my lodgings to pack my portmanteau and get ready for my sudden journey. I caught the train in comfortable time, and all in due course, without hitch or hindrance of any kind, arrived at Saltmarsh, not more than five minutes after the time mentioned in the time-table.

A servant in livery was standing on the platform. The moment he saw me he came up and touched his hat.

“Are you for Dr. Ogilvie’s, sir?” he asked. “Are you the doctor who is expected from London?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“My master’s brougham is outside,” continued the man. “Will you come this way, sir?”

I followed him at once, seated myself in the brougham, which was drawn by a pair of horses, and ten minutes later had alighted from the comfortable carriage and found myself standing in a wide, handsomely furnished and brightly lighted hall. A manservant opened the door to me.

“The doctor from London?” he queried, even before I had time to speak.

“Yes,” I answered, “I am Dr. Halifax; have the goodness to take this card to your master.”

“Come this way, sir. Oh, good Lord,” he muttered under his breath, “ain’t this a relief!”

There was a sort of terrified expression about the man’s face which I had already perceived faintly reflected on the countenance of the servant who had met me at the station.

“I’ll let my master know you’ve come, sir,” he said, and then he noiselessly shut the door and left me to myself.

I found myself standing in a room which any London physician would have considered palatial. It was lofty and very large. The floor was almost covered with the softest of Turkey carpets; the walls were hung with good pictures; and the furniture was handsome, modern, and in excellent taste.

I went and stood with my back to the glowing fire. I could not quite account for my own sensations, but the words I had heard the servant utter gave me a distinct sense of nervousness. I knew that a doctor ought to know nothing of such feelings, and I was ashamed of myself for owing to them, and made a great effort to pull myself together.

The next moment the door of the room was opened, and a gentlemanly man with silver hair and a soft, long beard entered.

“Mr. Halifax,” he said, bowing to me, “I must introduce myself as Dr. Roper. I am an old resident of Saltmarsh, and have known the Ogilvies for many years. Mrs. Ogilvie is seriously ill—*seriously!*—alarming, I ought to add, and I am attending her.”

“Is Dr. Ogilvie at home?” I asked.

"Pray sit down, Mr. Halifax, Dr. Ogilvie is out at the present moment. He expected you, and sent the carriage to the station. He was most anxious for your arrival, and will, I am sure, be in directly. In the meantime, will you allow me to do all I can for your comfort? You would like to come to your room; let me show you the way."

suffering from embolism. This is a strange disease to attack the brain of a young woman. Well, I must return to her; I will send the servant to attend to you and get you refreshment."

He went out of the room, closing the door as noiselessly as he had entered. The man-servant who had admitted me to the house came into the consulting-room bearing a tray which contained a plentiful cold supper.

"My master will, I am sure, be back in a moment," he said; "he was a good deal flurried over the missis's sudden illness, and has gone for a ride on the mare. We expect him back each minute, for he knew the train you'd arrive by."

"When he comes in, tell him that I am here," I answered.

"Yes, sir, I won't fail to."

The man looked at me intently—his face had not the wooden expression which characterizes most of his class, it showed marked agitation and uneasiness—he opened his lips as if about to make a confidence, then, thinking better of

it, closed them again and withdrew.

I ate some supper and then, sinking back in a comfortable chair, took up a book and tried to read.

Perhaps I had sunk into a doze un-awares. I cannot tell. I only know that I suddenly found myself standing up; that I knew the nervous sensations of the earlier part of the evening had returned with greater force than ever; that the little clock on the mantelpiece was chiming in a silvery note the hour of one, and the fire was burning low on the hearth.

"Good heavens!" I said to myself, "I must have had a sleep. Has that man not returned yet from his ride? One o'clock—I wonder if the servants have forgotten me and gone to bed."

I pressed the button of an electric bell in the wall, and waited for the result. The answer came quickly. The man-servant,



"PRAY SIT DOWN, MR. HALIFAX."

"I think I should prefer to wait for Dr. Ogilvie," I said. "You are much occupied with your patient, and I must not trespass upon a moment of your time. I am very comfortable here, and can wait for my host if he is not long. I understood from his telegram that he wants someone to look after his patients."

"He does—he has an immense practice, quite the largest in Saltmarsh. His wife's sudden illness has upset him frightfully, and he cannot collect his thoughts. I suggested to him to wire to Ray, and I am truly glad that you have been able to respond so quickly."

"Thank you," I replied; "please do not trouble yourself about me. I am sorry to learn that Mrs. Ogilvie is so ill."

"She is very ill, indeed; it is a strange seizure. She is a young woman, and up to the present has always been healthy. She is

looking more disturbed and uneasy than ever, entered the room.

"I'm sorry to say, sir," he began, not waiting for me to speak, "that my master has not yet returned. We can't none of us account for his absence."

"You don't fear an accident?" I asked.

"Oh, no, sir, that's scarcely likely. Dr. Ogilvie is the best rider in the country round, and though the mare is a bit skittish, she's like a lamb always when he sits on her. Dr. Ogilvie may have ridden over as far as Tewbury, which is a matter of eighteen miles from here; he has patients there, I know, and he may be detained for the night."

"Scarcely likely," I said, "with Mrs. Ogilvie so ill."

"She is that, sir; she's mortal bad, and we all think——" He stopped and forced back some words. "I can't tell you why my master isn't home, Dr. Halifax; but as there has been no call from any special patients this evening, perhaps you'd like me to take you to your room, sir."

"There does not seem any use in staying up longer," I said. "If you are going to sit up for Dr. Ogilvie, you can tell him that I am here, and can be disturbed at any moment if necessary. Now I will follow you upstairs."

I was shown into a comfortable room, furnished as handsomely as all the rest of the spacious house. A fire, newly made up, burned on the hearth, and several tall candles helped to make the apartment cheerful. I was dead tired, and did not take long tumbling into bed. I had scarcely laid my head on my pillow before I sank into a profound and dreamless sleep.

It seemed only to last a moment, although in reality I must have been in bed a couple of hours, when I was awakened by someone shaking me and flashing a light in my eyes.

"I wish you would get up, Mr. Halifax, and come with me," said Dr. Roper. "I cannot account for Dr. Ogilvie's prolonged absence. He has not yet returned, and Mrs. Ogilvie's condition is so

unsatisfactory that I should like you to see her."

"I will come at once," I replied.

I was not three minutes getting into my clothes, and an instant later found me in the sick chamber. It did not bear the ordinary appearance of a room of illness—the darkness and the enforced quiet of such chambers were both absent.

A merry fire burned on the hearth; candles were shedding cheerful rays over the room. A young woman who wore a nurse's cap and apron leant over the rail at the foot of the bed; a middle-aged woman, with a somewhat unpleasant face, was standing by the fire and occasionally bending forward to watch the contents of a saucepan which was heating on the flames. There was a strong smell of coffee in the apartment, and I did not doubt that the nurse and the attendant were going to prepare themselves cups of this beverage.

On entering the room my attention was primarily attracted by these two women, but when I turned to the bed I forgot all about them.

Seated upright on the bed was a little boy of from four to five years of age. He had a quantity of tumbled hair of a light shade,



"SEATED UPRIGHT ON THE BED WAS A LITTLE BOY."

which glistened in the candlelight. His eyes were preternaturally wide open; his lips were shut, so as to make a small straight line.

He glanced up at me not in alarm but in defiance, and stretching out one dimpled hand, laid it with a caressing motion on the head of the sick woman.

"That child ought to go to bed," I said to Dr. Roper.

"Oh, no, never mind him," he replied, quickly. "He is perfectly happy here, and determined to stay. He will make a noise if you disturb him."

I said nothing further, but bending over the bed prepared to examine the patient.

She was a young woman of not more than two or three and twenty. Her hair was abundant and of the same colour as the child's. Her eyes were partly closed—her face had a grey and ghastly appearance. In health she may have been pretty, but there was a look about her now which gave me again that nervous sensation which I had experienced once or twice before during the evening.

I proceeded at once to make the usual examinations. I found the skin of the patient warm and bathed in perspiration—the breathing was low and had a stertorous sound. The pulse was very slow.

I raised the lids of the eyes and looked into them. The pupils, as I expected, were considerably contracted. I took up a candle and passed it backwards and forwards before the face of the patient. She was, as I knew beforehand, absolutely insensible to light.

Dr. Roper began to speak to me in a hurried, anxious way.

"I heartily wish her husband were home," he said. "I have done all that is possible to arouse her, but in vain; each hour, each moment, the heavy stupor in which she is lying increases—in short, I have every reason to apprehend the worst consequences."

While the doctor was speaking, Taylor's opinions with regard to neurotic poisons kept flashing before my mind.

"I should like to speak to you in another room," I said; "come with me at once."

We went into the dressing-room.

Dr. Roper saw by my manner that I was disturbed, and his own uneasiness became more manifest.

"It is an awful responsibility to have a woman in this condition, and her husband unaccountably absent," he repeated.

"Never mind about her husband now," I said. "The thing is to restore her, and there is not an instant to lose."

"What do you mean; what more can we do?"

"You believe her to be suffering from embolism?" I said.

"Undoubtedly, all the symptoms point to it. There is a clot of blood in one of the arteries of the brain."

"Nothing of the kind," I said. "Your patient is suffering from the effects of an overdose of opium—not the faintest doubt on the subject."

To say that Dr. Roper turned pale is to give but a very faint idea of his appearance when I pronounced my verdict.

"Nonsense, nonsense," he said, with a sort of gasp; "who would give Mrs. Ogilvie opium? She was a perfectly strong woman—she suffered no pain of any sort. There was nothing to tempt her to administer it to herself; and as to her husband, he is devoted to her. For goodness' sake, young sir, don't come down to a quiet place like this and set such scandal afloat."

"I don't want to set any scandal going," I replied. "It is nothing to me what anyone thinks. You have called me in to see the patient. I pronounce the case one of opium poisoning, and I insist on immediately using restoratives. We must make use of the stomach-pump and see what electricity will do."

My manner was so firm, and I carried my convictions so plainly written on my face, that Dr. Roper began to be convinced against his will.

"There is not a moment to lose," I said. "Is there an electric battery in the house? I suppose Dr. Ogilvie has everything necessary for our purpose in his surgery."

Dr. Roper interrupted me.

"I wish to say," he began, in a hesitating voice, "that my friend, Ogilvie, and I consulted together over this case. Our opinions are absolutely unanimous. All the symptoms pointed to a cerebral clot."

"Excuse me," I said. "The state of the pupils of the eyes, the warmth of the patient's skin, the slow and yet stertorous breathing, can all be accounted for by an overdose of opium. If nothing is done to restore that young woman she will certainly die, and if she dies in my presence I shall think it my duty to see that some investigations take place. It will then rest with the post-mortem examination to prove the truth of my diagnosis or not."

"I wish Dr. Ogilvie were home," murmured the old physician, perspiration breaking out on his brow, and his eyes growing troubled. "But, on my soul, I believe you are right."

with regard to one point, and that poor young creature, so full of life and beauty only twenty-four hours ago, is really drifting into the other world. In that case it cannot be wrong to use any means for her restoration. I will fetch what you require, Mr. Halifax, and join you in the sick room in a moment."

He ran downstairs and I quickly returned to my patient.

I was relieved to find that the beautiful child was no longer seated on the bed; his anxious vigil had probably proved too much for his tender years, and he was now doubtless calmly asleep in his cot in another room. I bent over my patient—I felt she was my patient now—and I determined not to leave a stone unturned to bring her back to life. I wanted to discover if there were any odour of opium on her breathing.

I could not find any, but the more I looked at her, the more sure I was that this illness was an unnatural one, and that the poor young woman who lay before me had been poisoned by either accident or design.

I felt myself growing hot with indignation. What kind of man was Dr. Ogilvie? Why was he absent at such a critical moment? Why did the servants look so queer and troubled; and last, but not least, why was I myself for the first time in all my medical experience actually suffering from an attack of nerves?

I felt through and through my being that something horrible had been done in this room, and I much wondered whether the strong restoratives which I meant to employ would be in time to be of the least use.

Dr. Roper entered the room, and we began our task. The first thing was to remove what portion of the poison still remained in the patient's stomach. The electric battery was then brought into force and artificial respiration resorted to. For a long time we worked without any apparent result.

One glance at the contents of the stomach-pump had caused Dr. Roper to turn so white that I thought he would have to be helped out of the room, but he speedily recovered himself and assisted me with a will and determination which showed that his opinion now fully coincided with my own.

The two nurses were like trained automations in our hands.

There was a strange silence about our doings. We made little or no noise as we fought through the long hours of the night that awful fight with Death.

Towards morning a noise in the silent street caused Dr. Roper to utter a hurried,

thankful exclamation, and to my unbounded delight had an effect on my patient.

She opened her eyes, gave a faint smile, looked full at the old doctor, and murmuring her husband's name, closed them again.

"Ogilvie has returned," said Dr. Roper, glancing at me. "Thank Heaven! Whatever detained him can now be explained. Those were his horse's footsteps which you heard just now clattering up to the door."

"And Mrs. Ogilvie is better," I said. "I have every hope that she will do now. I dare not leave her for a little, but you might go down and acquaint Dr. Ogilvie with what has occurred during his absence."

"With what we have found?" began Dr. Roper. "No, no, he is an old friend—that must be another man's task."

"Hush," I said, "Mrs. Ogilvie is becoming more conscious each minute. We must be careful; she is very weak." I looked towards the bed as I spoke.

My patient now lay with her eyes wide open. They were still dim from the effect of the drug, but the unnatural ghastly colour had left her cheeks, and her breathing was quicker and more regular.

"Stay with her," I whispered to the old doctor. "You have but to administer restoratives at short intervals; I will see Dr. Ogilvie myself, and quickly return."

I left the room. I expected to see my host mounting the stairs, and hurrying with what speed he could to his wife's sick room.

Instead of that there was commotion and alarm. Alarm on the faces of some maid-servants who, with hot haste, were hurrying downstairs. Voices raised to a shrill pitch of terror and distress sounded from the hall. There were hurrying steps, the confusion caused by doors being opened hastily and banged again regardless of sound. Dr. Ogilvie was nowhere to be seen. What was he doing? Why had he remained absent so long and at such a critical time, and, above all things, why had he returned now to turn the quiet house into noise and confusion?

Mrs. Ogilvie was better, certainly, but her heart had undergone a severe strain, and any undue agitation might undo all our night's work, and cause the feeble, fluttering breath to cease.

I ran downstairs quickly.

"Hush! hush!" I said. "I must beg of you all to be quiet! Where is Dr. Ogilvie? I must speak to him immediately."

The servant who had let me into the house the day before now came forward. He was

only half-dressed, and his hair stood up wildly on his head.

"Will you step into this room, Mr. Halifax?" he said. "An awful thing has happened, sir. The mare has come home riderless!"

"Dr. Ogilvie's mare?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, sir. There's no sign of my poor master, and we all fear an awful accident. The brute was that trembling as never was

"Does the coachman live on the premises?" I asked.

"No, sir; his house is at the other end of the town."

"You had better go and wake him," I said. "You, of course, know two or three men who will help you in an emergency of this sort. By the way, is there not snow on the ground?"

"Yes, sir," replied George; "a light sprinkling. The snow has been falling for an hour or so, and is now resting."

"The snow will help you," I said. "The day is already beginning to break, and you will be easily able to trace the mare's footsteps over the fresh snow. We none of us can tell what has happened, but the probabilities point to Dr. Ogilvie having been thrown from his horse. I must go back at once to your mistress, who is better, but not out of danger."

"Thank the Lord she is better!" ejaculated

George, while a look of relief swept over the groom's face.

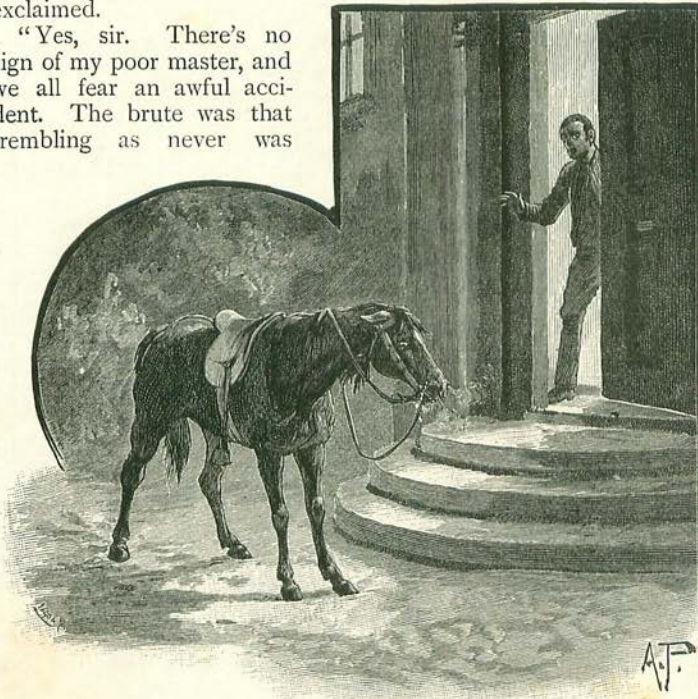
"She is better," I replied; "and now I trust to you, George, and to you, Williams, to start a search party with the least possible delay."

"Thank you, sir," the two men said. "There ain't no doubt that we'll do our very best."

They looked relieved, as people always do when they get definite and explicit directions. The men left the house immediately. I found it necessary, on re-entering the hall, to say a few words to the agitated women-servants.

"Get the house lighted up and well warmed," I said, "and do this with the least possible delay. Dr. Ogilvie is most probably hurt, and may be brought home before long. It will be well to get a bed made up in one of the downstairs rooms in case he is too much injured to be carried upstairs."

The maids were also pleased at being given work to do, and having restored a certain amount of order, I returned to my patient.



THE MARE HAS COME HOME RIDERLESS."

when it got to the door. Here's the groom—he'll tell you himself the state we found the mare in, all in a lather, and shivering from head to foot. You step in, Williams, and talk to the gentleman."

"It's true what he says," remarked Williams, who had been listening to our conversation from the open doorway. "I never see a critter in such a taking as that mare. She shook like a leaf, and whinnied like a baby. I can't think as the mare 'ud throw the doctor, for though she is a skittish piece, she was always like a lamb when he rode her. It's an awful business, and I can't make head nor tail of it. Perhaps he got off to see someone and tied her up as he do, and then she made off. But then her bridle would have broken, and it isn't. Well, well, George and me, we don't know what to do."

"What would you advise, sir?" asked the footman, who went by the name of George. "I suppose we must start a search party; but how we are to get them together, and it still dark night, is more than I can make out."

The moment I entered the room and looked at her, my heart gave a thankful bound. Whatever had happened, whatever dark cloud was hanging over the house, her young life was saved. The natural look of faintly returning health was reviving more and more each moment on her face. She turned her head when I entered the room and asked me a question.

"Is my husband in the house?" she asked.

"No," I replied, using that latitude with regard to truth which I considered in her case absolutely necessary. "He has been called out suddenly."

"I wonder he did not come to see me first," she answered, gently.

"He had not a moment—the case was urgent. It will be nice for him to find you so much better."

"Oh, yes, I am nearly well," she said, with a smile, and then she closed her eyes peacefully and sank into a natural sleep.

I motioned Dr. Roper out of the room, and told him as well as I could what had occurred.

The circumstances of the night, the appalling discovery we had made with regard to Mrs. Ogilvie's illness, had unmanned him a good deal, and now the grave fears which we were forced to share with regard to Dr. Ogilvie's fate completely prostrated the poor old man.

"I feel dazed, Halifax," he said. "I cannot realize what all this means. There isn't a better fellow living than Ogilvie; he is devoted to his wife; and she—well, pretty dear, I have known her from a baby. Who could have given her that opium?"

"The thing now is to find Dr. Ogilvie," I said. "We will assume that he has been thrown from his horse."

"Why do you say we will assume it? Of course the mare threw him—nasty thing she always was. I often warned him about her. Why do you say we will assume that Dr. Ogilvie has met with an accident, Halifax?"

I made no reply, but the old doctor read my thoughts in my face.

"No, no," he said, "it isn't that; it can't be that.

Well, I'll go myself and help to look for him."

He went downstairs, trembling and tottering.

"I will take care of Mrs. Ogilvie," I said, calling after him as he reached the lower landing. "Make your mind easy on that score, and have some wine before you start."

I then went back to the sick room. The patient still slept, and the nurses were softly moving about, putting the chamber in order, and removing all traces of the disorder which had reigned there while Death and the doctors were having their fight.

I sat down in an easy chair and, being very weary, dropped into a doze. I am sure I did not sleep long. When I awoke I observed that Mrs. Ogilvie was looking at me with a puzzled but gentle expression.

"I wish I knew your name," she said. "I have seen you in my dreams all night, but I don't know who you are."

"My name is Halifax," I said.

"Halifax," she repeated; "we don't know anyone called Halifax."

"You are unlikely to know me: I am a doctor from London; I have come down to help your husband with his patients, and as you were very ill last night and Dr. Ogilvie was away, I helped to look after you."

"Was I very ill?" she repeated. "I don't seem to remember anything, only that I was drowsy and hated to be disturbed. I had bad neuralgia yesterday morning, and my husband gave me something to drink. Soon



"HER FACE WAS VERY BLACK AND OMINOUS."

afterwards the pain went, and I felt very sleepy, nothing more. How could I have been ill if I felt no pain?"

"People are often ill without suffering pain," I replied. "Be thankful that you are much better this morning. I am going to order some breakfast for you now." Here I raised my voice. "Nurse," I said, "will you, please, get some strong tea for Mrs. Ogilvie?"

The hospital nurse left the room, but the older woman still sat keeping guard by the fire; her face was very black and ominous.

"Are you there, Jenkins?" called Mrs. Ogilvie.

"Yes, my dear," she replied, then she came over to the bedside, bent suddenly over the young wife and kissed her.

I was amazed at the change in her face when she did this. The sullenness gave place to a hungry sort of tenderness, as if a partly starved heart had been suddenly fed.

"You'll excuse me, sir," she said, turning to me, and I noticed that her eyes were full of tears; "but I have nursed Mrs. Ogilvie since she was a baby, and she's not twenty-three yet, poor dear."

She suddenly left the room, and I noticed for the first time how child-like, how younger even than her years, were the outlines of my patient's pretty face.

She was getting better each moment, but I dreaded her making inquiries about her husband.

The nurse came back with the tea, and I was leaving the room to go to my own to have a wash and dress, when one of the maid-servants came up to me and spoke hastily.

"If you please, sir," she said, "there's a woman downstairs. She has asked for Dr. Ogilvie. She says she's one of his patients, and won't be-

lieve me when I say that he's not in and not likely to be. I showed her into the consulting-room, and I thought maybe you'd come down and see her, sir."

"Yes," I said, "I will be down immediately."

I rushed into my room, made a hasty toilet, and went downstairs. The daylight was now shedding a sickly gleam over everything, but the large consulting-room had a neglected appearance, for the shutters were only partly removed from the windows, and the ashes of last night's fire were still grey and cheerless on the hearth.

Standing in the middle of the room was a tall, middle-aged woman with a florid face. She had a defiant sort of manner, and a habit of tossing her head, which accompanied more or less all her actions. She did not look like an invalid, and my heart gave a fresh beat of alarm as though I knew, even before she spoke, that a fresh leaf in the Book of Tragedy was about to be turned.

"Sit down," I said; "I am sorry Dr. Ogilvie is out."

"Oh, yes," she replied, "as if I'm likely to believe that little game! He don't want to see me; but you tell him, young man, that Flora's mother is here, and that here Flora's mother will stay until he comes to her."

"I don't understand you," I said. "Dr. Ogilvie has been absent all night—we are



"AS IF I'M LIKELY TO BELIEVE THAT LITTLE GAME!"

all terribly anxious about him ; we fear that his horse has thrown him, as it came back riderless this morning. If you will go away now and come later I may have tidings for you."

There was a vague hope in my mind that the woman might be a lunatic ; the best thing was to get her quietly out of the house and warn the servants on no account to re-admit her.

"Dr. Ogilvie is out," I repeated ; "I have no object in keeping the truth from you."

She looked startled for a moment when I spoke of a possible accident, but soon the old toss of the head re-asserted itself.

"Oh," she said, "you nearly took me in, but I'm too old to be gulled. I'll wait here for Dr. Ogilvie until he comes back. I gave him forty-eight hours, and the time's up: he was expecting me this morning. You send someone in to light the fire, young man, and I wouldn't object to a bit of breakfast."

There was nothing whatever for it but to humour the woman. Whether mad or sane she would not leave the house without making a disturbance. She was strong enough to fight, and she certainly seemed to have sufficient nerve to offer physical resistance if necessary.

"Very well," I said, after a pause, "if you won't go I will leave you here."

I went back into the hall, where one of the maid-servants was hovering restlessly about.

"Do you think you can get her asked to leave, sir?" she asked.

"No," I replied ; "she insists upon waiting to see your master."

"She hints very queer things, sir," continued the servant.

"I don't want to hear them," I answered, impatiently. "It is more than probable that the woman is deranged. Has she been here before?"

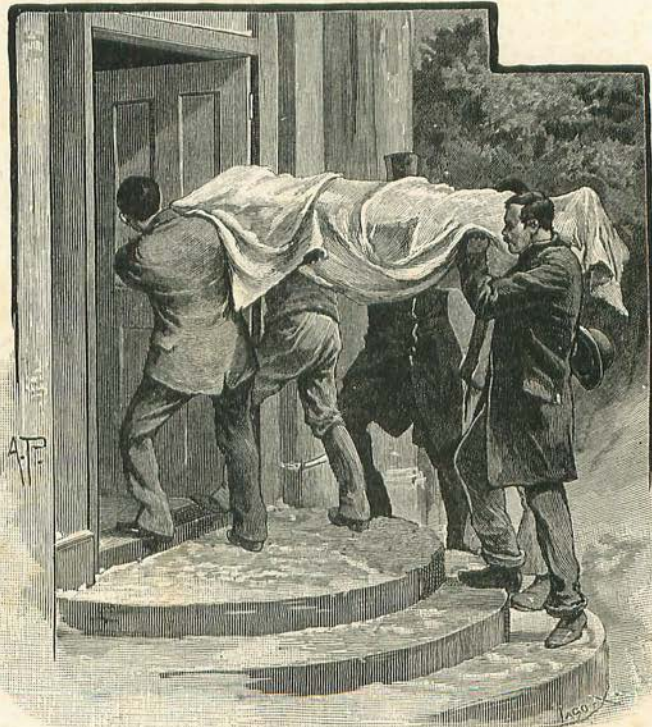
"Two days ago, sir, and just about this

hour, too. She was shut up with my master in his consulting-room for a long time. We all noticed how changed Dr. Ogilvie looked after that. He seemed to turn old all of a sudden. We all saw it."

"Well," I said, "you had better take the woman some breakfast. And please don't listen to a word she says, for I do not think she is accountable."

These remarks had scarcely passed my lips, and the servant had not attempted to obey my directions, before a sound of heavy footsteps in the street caused us both to turn pale. I rushed to the hall door and opened it.

Several men bearing a burden on a shutter were ascending the steps. A motionless figure, covered with a sheet, lay on the



"A FIGURE COVERED WITH A SHEET."

shutter. The men, without uttering a word, brought it straight into the house.

Dr. Roper accompanied them.

"Come in here," he said, and they carried their burden into the spacious dining-room and laid it on the centre table.

"Make no noise," whispered the doctor hoarsely to them ; "go quietly away."

Then he turned to me.

"Come into this room with me, Halifax," he said.

He pointed to a little conservatory which opened out of the dining-room. His manner had altered; it was now composed and quiet. I perceived that the shock he had received had the strange effect of absolutely steadying his nerves for the time.

"We found him," he began at once—"we found him several miles from home. The mare's footsteps were distinctly visible in the snow, and we had no difficulty in tracing them to the spot on the borders of a wood where the act was committed."

"He killed himself, then," I whispered.

"Yes, yes; my friend! my poor, poor friend! I found him myself, Halifax——"

Dr. Roper took out a handkerchief and wiped the damp from his brow as he spoke.

"I found him quite stiff and cold. The bottle that had contained the poison which he had swallowed was tightly clutched in his right hand. Poor, poor Ogilvie—oh, my God, that I should live to see this day!"

"Can you account for it?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, Halifax—yes—I can account for it—yes—that accounts for it."

He took a letter out of his pocket and thrust it into my hand.

"Read it," he said. "It is right you should know the truth. I found it in his breast pocket—it was addressed to me."

Dr. Roper turned to leave the conservatory—I opened the letter.

The words it contained were concise and calm. No trace of emotion was allowed to appear.

"MY DEAR ROPER," began the unfortunate doctor, "When you receive this I shall have died by my own hand. Life has become intolerable to me—I will tell you why.

"Two days ago there were few happier men than I. I had all, and more than I ever dreamed I could possess of happiness and the good things of life. Above and over all else, I was the husband of the sweetest wife in the world. I don't believe any two people were more devoted to each other than Maggie and I. Two days ago the storm which wrecks us both broke. I often told you that I had spent the early years of my medical life in Australia. But I never mentioned either to you or to Maggie that I was married when there. I married a handsome girl who turned out to be a virago—one of the cruellest, the most heartless, the wickedest women who ever polluted God's earth.

"After two years of absolute misery, which no words of mine can possibly describe, my

wretched wife died suddenly when I was engaged on business up the country. I was given the certificate of her death, and, relieved beyond measure, I returned to England, bought a practice here, and fell in love with my sweet Maggie and married her. We have been husband and wife for nearly six years; we have one beautiful child; no people could have been happier than we were.

"Two days ago a woman called to see me. To my horror I quickly recognised her as my first wife's mother. She told me at once that her daughter had never died. She gave reasons, which I need not enter into here, for the trick which had been played upon me. Since then tidings of my prosperity had reached the wretched pair, and they came to England determined to make me acknowledge my real wife and reinstate her in the place occupied by my beloved Maggie.

"Of course, I offered money, but all in vain—my real wife must have her rights or nothing. If I did not immediately reinstate her she would denounce me for bigamy. Finally, I asked for two days' grace to decide what steps to take. This was unwillingly conceded to. During twenty-four hours I thought the whole thing over. One does not take long to make up one's mind when one is in despair.

"I resolved not to bribe the women, not to argue with them, but by one fell stroke to cut the ground under their cruel feet. Roper, I resolved to kill both myself and Maggie. My Maggie, my darling, should never live to hear of the disgrace which would more than break her heart. Maggie should go first, by easy and painless steps, into the other world. There I would quickly meet her. I made my resolve, and this morning began to carry it into effect. I gave my dear and only true wife a portion of a certain drug which resembles morphia in its effects, but leaves no smell, and might easily make those not really acquainted with its peculiar power suppose the victim to be suffering from embolism. I heard of this drug in Australia, and had a small quantity with me. I do not know its name, but it is much used by the Australian aborigines. When taken in certain quantities it causes slow and painless death.

"I have watched Maggie during the whole of this awful day; there is now no chance of her recovering for a life of misery. I am going out on the mare; I shall ride a considerable distance, and then send the horse home. I have a large dose of the same poison in my pocket. It will kill me, Roper—I am a good riddance. Farewell."

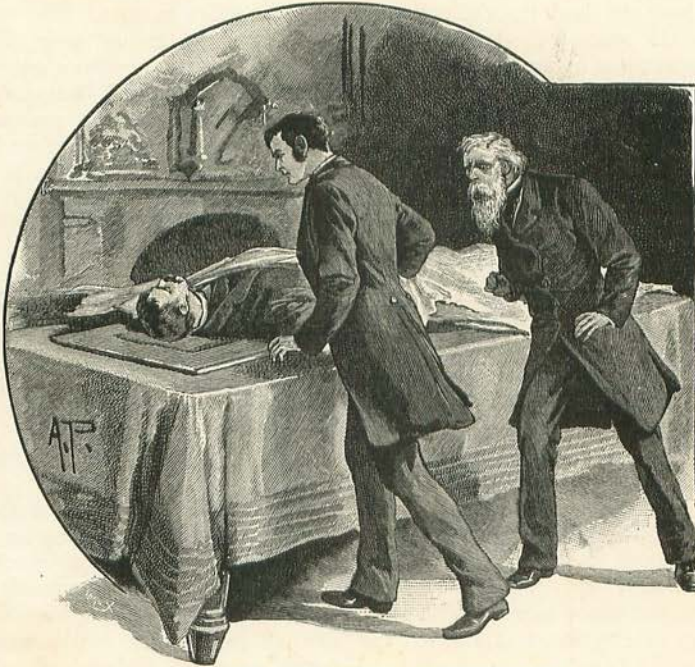
I had scarcely finished reading this miserable letter before Dr. Roper, his eyes blazing with excitement, rushed into the conservatory.

"For God's sake, Halifax, come at once," he gasped. "That awful woman has found her way into the room where the body is. Her nerves have given way completely at sight of it. She has confessed that her whole abominable story is a lie—that her daughter,

He may be only in a state of stupor. We saved his wife—we'll have a try for his recovery, too."

I ran from the room, and Roper, looking as if his senses had deserted him, followed me. We turned everyone out of the dining-room and locked the door. I flung the cloth off the dead man's face, and, seizing a looking-glass, held it to his lips.

"Thank God!" I exclaimed, turning to



"I FLUNG THE CLOTH OFF THE DEAD MAN'S FACE."

poor Ogilvie's first wife, has really been dead for years, and that she only invented her horrible fiction for purposes of blackmail."

"Then—then," I said with a sudden shout, which I could not repress, "we'll have a try for it."

"A try for what? Are you mad?"

"Why, Roper, don't you see?" I exclaimed. "Don't you see that if that woman's story is false, Ogilvie has nothing to die for? The drug he has taken is slow in its effects.

the old doctor and pointing to a faint dimness on its polished surface.

That is the story, for of course we did save Ogilvie. We had a harder fight than even that of the night before, but in the end the grim King of Terrors withdrew, and we, the humble instruments who had brought back life almost to the dead, fell on our knees in thankfulness. And Ogilvie's wife was never told the real story of that night.