

Stories from the Diary of a Doctor.

By the Authors of "THE MEDICINE LADY."

III.—VERY FAR WEST.



WAS a rather young-looking man until the incident which I am about to relate took place. I will frankly confess that it aged me, telling for a time on my nerves, and rendering my right hand so shaky that I was unfit to perform operations of a critical and delicate character. I had just got back to town after my summer holiday when the circumstance occurred which sends strange thrills of horror through me even now.

It was a fine night towards the end of September. I had not many patients at this time, and felt a sudden desire to go to the theatre. Hailing a hansom, I ordered the man to drive me to the Criterion. I was in evening dress, and wore a diamond ring of remarkable value on my finger. This ring had been the present of a rich nabob, one of my patients, who had taken a fancy to me, and had shown his preference in this manner. I dislike jewellery as a rule, and never wear it; but to-night I slipped the ring on my finger, more from a sudden whim than for any other reason. I secured a good seat in the front row of the dress circle, and prepared for an evening's amusement.

The play was nothing in particular, and the time of year was a slack one with regard to the audience. Soon the curtain was raised, and the players began their performance. They acted without much spirit, the regular company being away on tour.

I was beginning to regret I had come, when my attention was arrested by the late arrival of a couple, who seated themselves in the chairs next to my own. One of them was a man of striking appearance, the other a very young and lovely girl. The man was old. He had silvery white hair, which was cut

rather close to his head—dark eyes, a dark complexion, and a clean-shaven face. His lips were firm, and when shut looked like a straight line—his eyes were somewhat close to his very handsome, aquiline nose. He was a tall man, with broad shoulders, and held himself erect as if only twenty-five instead of sixty years had gone over his head.

His companion was also tall—very slender and willowy in appearance, with a quantity of soft blonde hair, a fair face, and eyes which I afterwards discovered were something the colour of violets. I am not a judge of dress, and cannot exactly describe what the girl



THE "LATE ARRIVALS."

wore—I think she was in black lace, but am not certain. I remember, however, quite distinctly that her opera-cloak was lined with soft white fur; I also know that

she held in her hand a very large white feather fan, which she used assiduously during the performance.

The girl sat next to me. She had an opera-glass, and immediately on her arrival began to use it for purposes of criticism. I guessed, by her manner and by her gently-uttered remarks to her companion, that she was an habitual playgoer, and I surmised, perhaps correctly—I cannot say—that she knew something by actual experience of amateur acting.

Bad as the play undoubtedly was, it seemed to interest this beautiful girl. Between the intervals, which she occupied examining the actors, she made eager remarks to the gentleman by her side. I noticed that he replied to her shortly. I further noticed that not the slightest movement on his part was unperceived by her. I felt sure that they were father and daughter, and was further convinced that they were intensely attached to each other.

I have never considered myself an impressionable character, but there is not the least doubt that this girl—I think I may say this couple—interested me far more than the play I had come to see. The girl was beautiful enough to rouse a man's admiration, but I am certain that the feeling in my breast was not wholly that. I believe now that from the first moment I saw her she threw a sort of spell over me, and that my better judgment, my cool reason, and natural powers of observation were brought into abeyance by a certain power which she must have possessed.

She dropped her fan with some awkwardness. As a matter of course, I stooped to pick it up. In doing so my hand inadvertently touched hers, and I encountered the full gaze of her dark blue eyes.

When the first act came to an end, the invariable attendant with ices put in an appearance.

"You will have an ice?" said the girl, turning eagerly to the gentleman by her side. He shook his head, but motioning to the woman to approach, bought one and gave it to his young companion.

"This will refresh you, Leonora," he said. "My dear, I wish you to eat it."

She smiled at him, and, leaning back comfortably in her chair, partook with evident gratification of the slight refreshment.

I was careful not to appear to watch her, but as I turned for the apparent purpose of looking at a distant part of the audience, I was startled by the fixed gaze of the man who sat

by her side. His closely-set dark eyes were fixed on me. He seemed to look me all over. There was a sinister expression in the thin lines of his closely-shut lips. The moment I glanced at him he turned away. I felt a sudden sense of repulsion. I have had something of the same feeling when I looked full into the eyes of a snake.

The curtain rose, and the play went on. The girl once more had recourse to her opera-glasses, and once more her full attention was arrested by the commonplace performance. About the middle of the act, her elderly companion bent over and whispered something to her. Her hand trembled, the opera-glass slid down unnoticed on her lap. She looked at him anxiously, and said something which I could not hear.

"I shall be better outside," I heard him whisper in response. "Don't be anxious; I'll come back as soon as ever I am better."

He rose and made his way toward the nearest entrance.

As he did so, I turned and looked after him.

"Is he ill?" I whispered to myself. "He does not look it. How anxious that poor girl is. Her hand is trembling even now."

When the man got as far as the entrance door he turned and looked at the girl, and for an instant his cat-like eyes gave me a second swift glance. Again I felt a sensation of dislike, but again the feeling quickly passed.

I wish to repeat here, that I think my judgment was a little in abeyance that evening. I felt more attracted than ever by my next-door neighbour, and yet I am certain, positively certain, that the feeling which actuated me was not wholly admiration.

The play went on, but the girl no longer looked through her opera-glasses. She sat listlessly back in her chair. Now and then she turned impatiently towards the door, and then, with a quick sigh, glanced at her programme, or used her large feather fan with unnecessary force.

The minutes went on, but the old gentleman did not return. Once the girl half rose from her seat, pulling her opera-cloak about her as she did so; but then again she sat quietly back, with a sort of enforced calm.

I was careful not to appear to watch her, but once her eyes met mine, and the unspeakable anxiety in them forced me, involuntarily, to bend forward and make my first remark to her.

"Can I do anything for you?" I whispered. "Are you anxious about your companion?"

"Oh, thank you," she replied, with a long-drawn sigh. "The gentleman is my father. I am very anxious about him. I fear he is ill."

"Would you like me to go and see why he has not returned?" I asked.

"If you would be so kind," she answered, eagerly.

I rose, and went out into the lobbies. I went quickly to the gentlemen's cloak-room, and put some questions to the attendant.

"Is there an elderly gentleman here?" I asked—"tall, with white hair and a somewhat dark complexion. He left the theatre half an hour ago, and his daughter is afraid that he has been taken ill."

The man who had charge of the room knew nothing about him, but another attendant who was standing near suddenly remarked:—

"I think I know the gentleman you mean. He is not ill."

"How can you tell?" I replied.

"Well, about half an hour ago a man answering exactly to your description came out of the theatre. He came from the dress circle.

He asked for a cigar, and lighted it. I lost sight of him immediately afterwards, but I think he went out."

I returned to give this information to the anxious girl. To my surprise it did not at all comfort her.

"He must be ill," she replied. "He would not leave me alone if he were not ill. I noticed that an attack was coming on. He is subject to attacks of a serious character. They are of the nature of fits, and they are dangerous, very dangerous."

"If he were ill," I replied, "he would have sent you word in here, and have got you to

go to him. He may merely have gone out to get a little air, which relieves him."

"I do not know. Perhaps," she replied.

"And when he is at home," I continued, "if he really has gone home without you, he will naturally send at once for a doctor."

She shook her head when I made this last remark.

"My father will never see a doctor," she said; "he hates the medical profession. He does not believe in doctors. He has such a prejudice against them, that he would rather die than consult one."

"That is a pity," I answered, "for in cases like his, I have no doubt that there is much alleviation to be obtained from men who really understand the science of medicine."

She looked fixedly at me when I said this. Her face was quite piteous in its anxiety. I could see that she was very young, but her features looked small and drawn now, and her eyes almost too large for her little face.

"I am very anxious," she said, with a sigh. "My father is the only relation I possess; I am

his only child. He is ill—I know he is very ill. I am most anxious."

She pulled her opera-cloak once more tightly about her, and looked with lack-lustre eyes on the stage. Our conversation had been so low that no one had been disturbed by it; we were obliged to keep our heads close together as we conversed, and once, I am sure, her golden hair must have touched my cheek.

"I cannot stand this any longer," she exclaimed, suddenly. "I must go out—I won't wait for the end of the play."

She rose as she spoke, and I followed her,



"IS THERE AN ELDERLY GENTLEMAN HERE?" I ASKED.

as a matter of course. We found the lobbies almost deserted, and here I suddenly faced her and tried to use argument.

"You are unnecessarily sensitive and alarmed," I said. "I assure you that I speak with knowledge, as I am a member of the medical profession, against which your father has such a prejudice. A man as ill as you describe your father to be would not stop to light a cigar. I took the liberty of having a good look at your father when he was leaving the theatre, and he did not appear ill. A medical man sees tokens of illness before anyone else. Please rest assured that there is nothing much the matter."

"Do you think," she answered, flashing an angry glance at me, "that if there is nothing the matter, my father would leave me here alone? Do you think he cares so little about me that he would not return to take me home?"

I had no reply to make to this. Of course, it was scarcely likely that any father would leave so beautiful a young girl unprotected in a theatre at night.

"And," she continued, "how do you know that the gentleman who asked for a cigar was my father? There may have been somebody else here with white hair."

I felt convinced that the man who lit a cigar and the father of this young girl were identical, but again I had no answer to make.

"I must go home," she said. "I am terribly anxious—my father may be dead when I get home—he may not have gone home at all. Oh, what shall I do? He is all the world to me; if he dies, I shall die or go mad."

"I am sure your fears are exaggerated," I began, "but perhaps the best thing you can do is to go home. Have you a carriage—shall I see if it has arrived?"

"My father and I have a private hansom," she answered. "It may not have come yet, but perhaps it has. I will go with you, if you will allow me. You wouldn't recognise the hansom."

"Then take my arm," I said.

I led her downstairs. I am not impressionable, but the feel of her little fingers on my coat-sleeve was, to say the least of it, sympathetic. I earnestly wished to help her, and her exaggerated fears did not seem unnatural to me.

The private hansom was waiting just round the corner. It had arrived on the scene in good time, for the play would not be over for nearly another hour. I helped the young lady in. She was trembling very much, and her face, lit up by the gaslight, looked pale.

"Would you like me to see you home?" I asked. "I will, with pleasure."

"Oh, if you would be so kind!" she answered. "And did not you say that you are a medical man? If my father is ill, it might be possible for you to prescribe for him."

"He will not allow it, I fear," I answered. "You say he has no faith in doctors."

"No more he has, but when he gets these strange, these terrible seizures, he is often unconscious for a long, long time. Oh, do please see me home, Dr.—"

"Halifax," I answered.

"Thank you, so much. My name is Whitby—Leonora Whitby. Please, Dr. Halifax, come home with me, and prescribe for my father if you possibly can."

"I will come with you with pleasure," I answered. I stepped into the hansom as I spoke.

She made way for me to seat myself by her side. The sweep of her long black lace dress fell partly over my legs. The hansom driver opened the little window in the roof for directions.

"What address am I to give?" I said to Leonora Whitby.

"Tell him to go back," she answered, quickly.

"Go back," I shouted to the man.

He slapped down the little window and we started forward at a brisk pace. It was not until long afterwards that I remembered that I was going away with a strange girl, to a place I knew nothing about, the address even of which was unknown to me.

It was a splendid starlight night; the air was very balmy. It blew into our faces as we travelled westward. First of all we dashed down Piccadilly. We passed Hyde Park Corner, and turned in the direction of those innumerable squares and fashionable houses which lie west of St. George's Hospital. Leonora talked as we drove together. She seemed to be almost in good spirits. Once she said to me very earnestly:—

"I do not know how to thank you. It is impossible for me to tell you how deeply indebted I am to you."

"Don't mention it," I answered.

"But I must," she replied. "I cannot be merely conventional, when I am treated so unconventionally. Another man would not have noticed a girl's anxiety, nor a girl's distress. Another man would not have lost half the play to help an anxious girl. Another man would not have put complete faith in a stranger as you have done; Dr. Halifax."

"I do not know that I have done anything more than a man in my profession ought to be ready to do at all times," I answered. "You know, or perhaps you do not know, that a doctor who really loves his profession puts it before everything else. Whenever it calls him, he is bound to go. You have asked me to visit a sick man with you—how is it possible for me to refuse?"

"You are the first doctor who has ever come to our house," she answered.

A great blaze of gaslight from a large central lamp fell on her face as she spoke. I could not help remarking its pallor. Her eyes were full of trouble. Her lips were tremulous.

"You are the first doctor who has ever come to our house," she repeated. "I almost wish I had not asked you to come."

"Why so? Do you think your father will resent my visit—that he will regard it as an intrusion?"

"Oh, it isn't that," she answered. Then she seemed to pull herself together as with a great effort.

"You are coming, and there's an end of it," she said; "well, I shall always be grateful to you for your kindness."

"I hope I may be able to assist your father."

When I said this her face grew brighter.

"I am sure you will," she said, eagerly.

"You look clever. The moment I saw your face, I knew you were clever. The moment I looked at your hands, I saw capabilities in them. You have got the hands of a good surgeon."

"What can you know about it?" I answered, with a laugh.

"Oh," she said, with an answering laugh, "there are few things I do not know something about. You would be an encyclopædia of all kinds of strange knowledge if you led my life."



"GO BACK," I SHOUTED.

"Well," I said, "I, of course, know nothing about you, but will you answer one pardonable question? Where are we going? I do not quite recognise this part of town, and yet I have lived in London the greater part of my days. Are we going east, west, north, or south? I have lost my bearings. What is your address?"

"We are going west," she replied, in a perfectly cold, calm voice. Then, before I could interrupt her, she pushed her long feather

fan through the window.

"Take the short cut, Andrews," she called to the driver. "Don't go the round. We are in a great hurry; take the short cut."

"Yes, miss," he shouted back to her.

We were driving down a fairly broad thoroughfare at the time, but now we turned abruptly and entered the veriest slums I had ever seen. Shouting children, drunken men and women filled the streets. A bad smell rose on the night air.

Was it possible that this beautiful, refined-looking girl lived in so repulsive a neighbourhood? But no, it was only as she expressed it, a short cut. The horse was a fleet one, and we soon found ourselves in a lonely and deserted square. We pulled up at a house which had not a light showing anywhere. I got out first and helped Miss Whitby to descend from the hansom.

"Will you kindly inquire if your father has returned?" I asked her; "for if not, there does not seem much use in my coming in."

"Oh! come in, in any case for a moment," she answered, in a cheerful tone. "I can see that the servants have all gone to bed, so

I must let myself in with this latch-key, but I shall find out in a moment if father has returned. Just come in and wait in the hall until I find out."

She raised her beautiful face to mine as she spoke. Her opera-cloak fell away from her slim shoulders. One white slender hand was raised to push back a refractory lock of golden hair. There was a solitary gas lamp at the corner, and it lit up her willowy figure. I looked at her with a sense of admiration which I could scarcely disguise. We entered the house.

"By the way, can you tell me if there is a cab-stand anywhere near?" I asked, suddenly, "as when I have done with your father, I should like to hasten home, and I have not the least idea what part of the world I am in."

"West," she answered, "very much west. When you leave this house, all you have to do is to take the first turning on your right, and you will find a cab-stand. There are night cabs always on the stand, so it will be perfectly easy for you to get home whenever your duties here are ended."

We were now standing inside the house. The heavy hall door suddenly slammed behind us. We were in pitch darkness.

"What a worry the servants are," exclaimed Miss Whitby's voice. "I always desire them to leave matches and a candle on the hall table. They have neglected my orders. Do you mind staying for a moment in the dark, Dr. Halifax?"

"Not at all," I replied.

She rushed away. I heard her footsteps getting fainter and fainter as she ascended the stairs. She was evidently going to seek matches up several stories. I was alone in the strange house. Silent as the grave was the dark hall. I turned my head to see if any stray beams of gaslight were coming through the fan-light. I found that there was no fan-light. In short, the darkness was of the Egyptian order — it might be felt.

The moments passed. Miss Whitby was a long time coming back. As I stood and waited for her, the darkness seemed to me to become more than ever Egyptian.

I heard a faint sound beneath me. Where did it come from? Did the servants, who kept such early hours, sleep in the cellars? I sprang in the direction of the hall door,

Could I have found the lock I would certainly have opened it, if for no other reason than to let in a little light.

Fumble as I would, however, I could not discover any hasp, handle, or bolt. The next instant a glimmer of light from above streamed gratefully down, and I heard the swish of Leonora's evening dress.

"I beg a thousand pardons," she exclaimed, as she joined me. "What must you think of my leaving you so long in that dark, dismal hall? But the fact is, I could not resist the temptation of finding out whether my father had returned. He has; he is still



"'I BEG A THOUSAND PARDONS,' SHE EXCLAIMED."

in his bedroom. Now, will you come upstairs with me?"

She ran on in front, and I obediently followed. On the first landing we entered a sitting-room, which was gaily lighted with a couple of lamps covered with soft gold shades, and on the centre table of which a meal was spread.

"Sit down for a moment," said Miss Whitby; "you must have some refreshment. What can I give you? I am always stupid about opening champagne bottles; but perhaps you can do it for yourself. This is *Jules Mumm*. If my father were here I am sure he would recommend it."

"I don't care for anything," I replied. "If your father is ill, I should like to see him. Have you told him that I am here?"

"No. Do you think I would dare? Did not I tell you how he hated doctors?"

"Then perhaps he is not ill enough to need one," I said, rising to my feet. "In that case I will wish you good evening."

"Now you are angry with me," said Miss Whitby; "I am sure I am not surprised, for I have taken a most unwarrantable liberty with you. But if you only would have patience! I want you to see him, of course, but we must manage it."

She sank down on a sofa, and pressed her hand to her brow. She was wonderfully beautiful. I can frankly state that I had never seen anyone so lovely before. A strange sensation of admiration mixed with repulsion came over me, as I stood by the hearth and watched her.

"Look here," I said, suddenly, "I have come to this house for the express purpose of seeing your father, who is supposed to be ill. If you do not take me to him immediately, I must say good-night."

She laughed when I said this.

"It's so easy to say good-night," she replied. Then, of a sudden, her manner changed. "Why do I tease you," she said, "when you have been more than kind to me? In truth, there never was a girl in all London who had less cause for laughter than I have now. There is one being in the world whom I love. My fears about my father have been verified, Dr. Halifax. He has just gone through one of those strange and terrible seizures. When he left the theatre I knew he would have it, for I am so well acquainted with the signs. I hoped we should have returned in time to see him in the unconscious stage. He has recovered consciousness, and I am a little anxious about the effect on him of your presence in the room. Of course, beyond anything, I want you to see him. But what do you advise me to do?"

Her manner was so impressive, and the sorrow on her young face so genuine, that once more I was the doctor, with all my professional instincts alive and strong.

"The best thing to do is this," I said. "You will take me to your father's room,

and introduce me quite quietly as Dr. Halifax. The chances are a hundred to one that when he sees the real doctor, his prejudices against the imaginary ones will melt into air. One thing at least I can promise—he shall not blame you."

Miss Whitby appeared to ponder over my advice for a moment.

"All right," she said, suddenly. "What you suggest is a risk, but it is perhaps the best thing to do. We will go upstairs at once. Will you follow me?"

The house was well furnished, but very dark. There was a strange and unusual absence of gas. Miss Whitby held a lighted candle in her hand as she flitted upstairs.

We paused on the next landing. She turned abruptly to her right, and we entered a room which must have been over the sitting-room where the supper was laid. This room was large and lofty. It was furnished in the old-fashioned style. The four-post bedstead was made of dark mahogany. The wardrobe and chairs were of the same. When we entered the room was in darkness, and the little flicker of the candle did not do much to light it up.

Leonora laid it down on a table, and walked directly up to the bed. A man was lying there stretched out flat with his arms to his sides. He was in evening dress, and it did not take me an instant to recognise him as the old man who had accompanied the girl to the theatre. His eyes were shut now, and he looked strikingly handsome. His whole face was so pale, that it might have been cut in marble. He did not move an eyelid nor stir a finger when I approached and bent over him.

"Father," said Miss Whitby.

He made her no answer.

"He is unconscious again—he is worse," she exclaimed, clasping her hands, and looking at me with terror.

"No, no," I answered. "There is nothing to be alarmed about."

I said this in confidence, for I had taken hold of my patient's wrist, and found that the pulse was full and steady. I bent a little closer over the man, and it instantly flashed through my mind with a sensation of amazement that his unconscious condition was only feigned.

I remembered again the sinister expression of his eyes as he left the theatre, and the thought which flashed then through my brain returned to me.

"He does not look ill."

I put his hand back on the bed, but not too quietly, and asking Miss Whitby to bring

the candle near, deliberately lifted first one eye-lid and then the other. If the man were feigning unconsciousness he did it well. The eyes had a glassy, fixed appearance, but when I passed the candle backwards and forwards across the pupils, they acted naturally. Raising an eye-lid I pressed the tip of one finger on the eye-ball. He flinched then—it was enough.



"I PRESSED THE TIP OF ONE FINGER ON THE EYE-BALL."

"There is no immediate cause for anxiety," I said, aloud. "I will prepare a medicine for your father. When he has had a good sleep he will be much as usual. Have you anyone who will go to the nearest chemist's?"

"I will go, if necessary," she replied. "The servants have gone to bed."

"Surely one of them could be awakened," I answered. "In a case of this kind, you must not be too regardful of their comforts. I will sit with Mr. Whitby, while you run and rouse one of your servants."

"Very well," she said, after a pause; "I will do so."

"Won't you take the candle?" I asked.

"No," she replied, "I can find my way in the dark."

She left the room, closing the door behind her.

The moment she had done so, the patient on the bed moved, opened his eyes, and sat up. He looked full at me.

"May I ask your name?" he inquired.

"Dr. Halifax—I have been asked to prescribe for you by your daughter."

"You sat near us at the Criterion?"

"I did."

"Did my daughter ask you to come home with her?"

"Not exactly—I offered to do so—she seemed in distress about you."

"Poor Leonora," he said—and then he glanced towards the door.

"Did she tell you that I place no faith in your profession?" he asked again, after a pause.

"She did, and that being the case, now that you are really better, I will leave you."

"No, don't do so. As you have come in one sense uninvited, I will put you to the test—you shall prescribe for me."

"Willingly," I replied; "and now, as it is necessary for a doctor and his patient to clearly understand each other, I may as well tell you at once that, the moment I saw you, I knew that you were not unconscious."

"You are right, I was perfectly conscious."

"Why did you feign to be otherwise?" I asked.

"For Leonora's sake, and—my God, I cannot stand this any longer!" He started upright, then fell back with a groan.

"Lock the door," he said; "don't let her in. I am in agony, in frightful agony. I suffer from *angina pectoris*."

"Leonora knows nothing of this," he gasped. "I conceal it from her. I let her imagine that I suffer from a sort of epileptic fit. Nothing of the kind. This hell fire visits me, and I keep it from Leonora. Now that you have come, give me something, quick, quick!"

"I would, if I had the necessary remedy by me," I replied. "If you will allow me, I will write a prescription for your servant. I can get what is necessary at the nearest chemist's. If you prefer it, I will go myself to fetch what is required."

"No, no—stay—not in this room, but

downstairs. Leonora will take your message. I hear her now at the door. Let her in—keep your own counsel. Do not betray me.”

“I can let her in, in a moment,” I answered; “but first let me say that I think you are doing very wrong. Miss Whitby has, I am convinced, presence of mind and strength of character. She would bear to know the true state of things. Sooner or later she must find out. If you give me permission, I will tell her. It is best for me to tell her.”

“What I suffer from will kill me in the end, will it not?” inquired Whitby.

“What you suffer from, I need not tell you, is a serious malady. I have not, of course, gone carefully into your case, and it is impossible to do so until the paroxysm of pain is over. In the meantime, trinitrin will give you immediate relief.”

“Let me in, please,” called Leonora’s voice through the keyhole.

“In one moment,” I answered. Then I turned to the sick man.

“Shall I tell your daughter, Mr. Whitby? She must have heard us talking. She will know that you have at least returned to consciousness.”

“You can tell her that I am in some pain,” he replied, “that I have recovered consciousness, and that you are going to administer trinitrin; now go. Promise me that you will reveal nothing further to-night.”

He groaned as he spoke, clutched the bed-clothes, and writhed in agony.

“I will promise to do as you wish,” I said, pity in my tone.

I unlocked the door, and stood before Miss Whitby.

“My father is better; he has recovered consciousness,” she exclaimed at once.

“He wishes to be alone and quiet,” I replied. “Darkness will be good for him. We will take the candle and go downstairs.”

I lifted it from the table as I spoke, and we descended together to the sitting-room.

“Is your servant coming for the message?” I inquired,

“Yes,” she answered. “He will be dressed in a moment.”

“Then, if you will give me a sheet of paper and a pen and ink, I will write my prescription,” I said.

She fetched me some paper at once; a pen and ink, and a blotting-pad.

“Write,” she said. “After you have written your prescription, and the servant has gone to fetch the medicine, you must tell me the truth.”

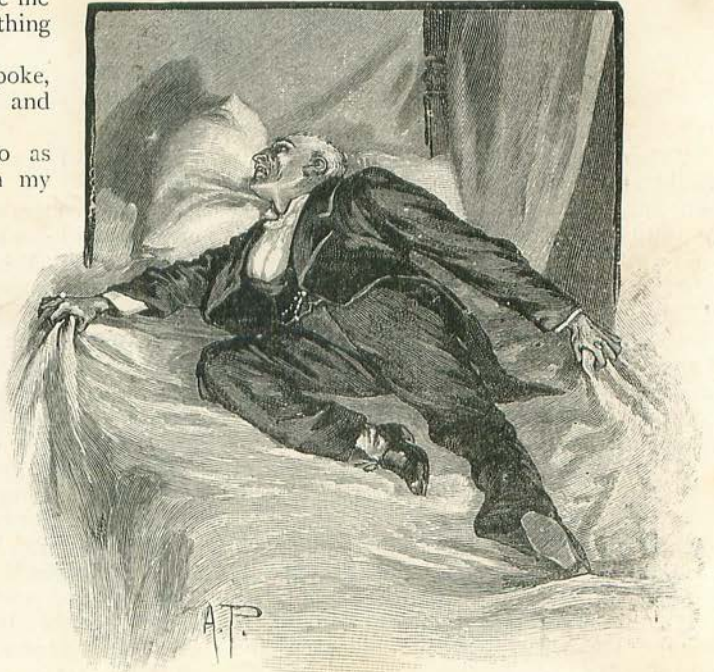
I made no reply at all to this. I wrote for a certain preparation (trinitrin) and a hypodermic syringe. I handed the paper to Miss Whitby. She stood for a moment with it in her hand, then she left the room.

“The servant is a long time coming down,” she said when she returned. “How slow, how unsympathetic servants are, and yet we are good to ours. We treat them with vast and exceptional consideration.”

“You certainly do,” I replied. “There are few houses of this kind where all the servants go to bed when their master and mistress happen to be out. There are few houses where the servants retire to rest when the master happens to be dangerously ill.”

“Oh, not dangerously, don’t say that,” she answered.

“I may be wrong to apply the word ‘danger’ just now,” I replied; “but in any case, it



“HE WRITHED IN AGONY.”

is important that your father should get relief as soon as possible. I wish you would let me go to the chemist myself."

"No, the servant is coming," she answered.

Heavy footsteps were heard descending the stairs, and I saw through the partly open door the outline of a man's figure. Leonora gave him the paper, with directions to hurry, and he went downstairs.

"Now, that is better," she said, returning to the room. "While we wait you will eat something, will you not?"

"No, thank you," I replied.

The food on the table was appetizing. There were piles of fresh sandwiches, a lobster salad, and other dainties; but something in the air of the place, something in the desolation of the dark house, for this was the only well-lighted room, something in the forlorn attitude of the young girl who stood before me, suspense in her eyes, anxiety round her lips, took away the faintest desire to eat.

If what the man upstairs said was true, his tortures must be fiendish. Leonora asked me again to eat—again I refused.

"Will you open one of those bottles of champagne?" she said, suddenly. "I am faint, I must have a glass."

I did her bidding, of course. She drank off about half a glass of the sparkling wine, and then turned to me with a little additional colour.

"You are a good man," she said, suddenly.

"I am sorry that we have so troubled you."

"That is nothing," I replied, "if I can be of benefit to your father. I should like to come here to-morrow and go carefully into his case."

"And then you will tell me the truth, which you are concealing now?" she answered.

"If he gives me permission," I replied.

"Oh, I knew there was something which he would not tell," she retorted; "he tries to deceive me. Won't you sit down? You must be tired standing."

I seated myself on the first chair, and looked round the room.

"This is a queer, old-fashioned sort of place," I said. "Have you lived here long?"

"Since my birth," she answered. "I am seventeen. I have lived here for seventeen years. Dr. Halifax?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"Do you mind my leaving you alone? I feel so restless, impatient, and nervous; I will go to my father until the messenger returns."

"Certainly," I replied; "and if he gets

worse call to me, and I will come to you immediately; he ought not to be left long alone. I am anxious to give him relief as speedily as possible. This injection of trinitrin will immediately do so. I hope your messenger will soon return from the chemist's."

"He will be back presently. The chemist we employ happens to live at a little distance. I will go upstairs now."

"Very well," I replied, "make use of me when you want me."

She smiled, gave me a long glance with an expression on her face which I could not fathom, and softly closed the door behind her. It was a padded door, and made no sound as it closed.

I sat down in an easy chair; a very comfortable one, with a deep seat. I shut my eyes, for I was really beginning to feel tired, and the hour was now past midnight. I sincerely hoped the servant would soon return with the medicine. I was interested in my strange patient, and anxious to put him out of his worst tortures as soon as possible. I saw, as in a picture, the relief which would sweep over Leonora Whitby's face when she saw her father sink into a natural slumber.

She was evidently much attached to him, and yet he had treated her badly. His conduct in leaving her alone at the theatre, whatever his sufferings might have been, was scarcely what one would expect from a father to so young and lovely a girl. He had deliberately exposed his own child to the chances of insult. Why had he done this? Why, also, had he only feigned unconsciousness? How very unconventional, to say the least, was his mode of treating his child. He gave her to understand that he suffered from epileptic fits, whereas in reality his malady was *angina pectoris*.

Here I started and uttered a sudden loud exclamation.

"My God!" I said to myself. "The man cannot suffer from *angina pectoris*, his symptoms do not point to it. What is the matter with him? Did he feign the agony as well as the unconsciousness? He must have a monomania."

I could scarcely believe that this was possible. I felt almost certain that his tortures were not assumed. That writhing at least was natural, and that death-like pallor could scarcely be put on at will. The case began to interest me in the strangest way. I heartily wished the servant to return in order to see some more of my most peculiar patient.

After a time in my restlessness I began to pace up and down the room. It was large, lofty, and covered from ceiling to floor with book-cases, which were all filled with bright, neat-looking volumes. Books generally give a cheerful aspect, but, for some reason which I could not account for at the time, these did not.

I might look at one, however, to pass away the time, and I went up to a goodly edition of Dickens's works, intending to take down a volume of "Martin Chuzzlewit" to read. I put my hand on the book, and tried to draw it out of the case. To my amazement, I found that this book and all its companions were merely dummies. In short, the room which looked so full of the best literature, was empty of even one line of respectable print.

I sat down again in my chair. The supper on the table did not in the least tempt my appetite—the champagne could not allure me. There was a box of cigars lying temptingly near on the mantelpiece, but I was not disposed to smoke.

I made up my mind that, if the servant delayed his return much longer, I would open the door, call to Miss Whitby, tell her that I would go myself to the chemist's, and bring the medicine which was necessary for my patient's relief. I felt that movement was becoming indispensable to me, for the gloom of the house, the queer-ness of the whole of this adventure, were beginning at last to tell on my nerves.

Suddenly, as I sat back in the depths of the easy chair, I became conscious of a very queer and peculiar smell. I started to my feet in alarm, and rushing to the nearest window, tried to open it. I discovered that it was a solid frame from bottom to top, and was not meant to move. In short, it was a window which could not open. I tried the other with similar results. Meanwhile, the smell got worse—it rose to my head, and rendered me giddy.

What was the matter? Had I been entrapped into this place? Was my life in danger? Was there a fire in one of the rooms underneath? Yes, this was probably the

solution of the enigma—a room had caught fire in the old house, and Leonora Whitby and her father knew nothing of it. I felt a passing sense of relief as this idea occurred to me, and staggered rather than walked to the door. The smell which affected me resembled the smell of fire, and yet there was a subtle difference. It was not caused by ordinary fire.

I reached the door and turned the handle. I was gasping for breath now, and felt that I had not a moment to lose in getting into purer air. I turned the ivory handle of the door frantically. It moved in my grasp—



"I STARTED TO MY FEET IN ALARM."

moved round and round, but did not open. In short, I was locked in—I was becoming asphyxiated. I felt my heart throbbing and my chest bound as by iron.

At this desperate instant I saw, to my relief, an unexpected sight. There was another door to the room. This door was evidently not meant to be noticed, for it was completely made up of the false books, and when shut could not be detected. I noticed it now, for it was slightly, very slightly, ajar. I rushed to it, flung it open, and entered another room. Then, indeed, my agony reached its climax. A man in evening dress was lying full length on the floor, absolutely

unconscious, and probably dead. I staggered towards him, and remembered nothing more.

I came to myself, I do not know when—I do not know how. I was in a hansom. I



"I STAGGERED TOWARDS HIM."

was being driven rapidly through streets which were now almost deserted, in some direction, I knew not where. I could not recall at first what had occurred, but memory quickly returned to me. I saw the face of the dead man as he lay stretched on the floor. I saw once again that dreadful room, with its false books, its mockery of supper, its mockery of comfort. Above all things, I smelt once again that most horrible, suffocating odour.

"Charcoal," I muttered to myself. "There must have been a charcoal furnace under the room. I was duped into that den. Leonora Whitby, beautiful as she appeared, was in league with her father to rob me and take my life; but how have I escaped? Where am I now—where am I going? How, in the name of all that is wonderful, have I got into this hansom?"

There was a brisk breeze blowing, and each moment my brain was becoming clearer.

The fumes of the charcoal were leaving me. I was vigorous and well—quite well, and with a keen memory of the past once again. I pushed my hand through the little window, and shouted to the driver to stop.

"Where are you taking me?" I asked. "How is it that I am here?"

He pulled up immediately, and drew his horse towards the pavement. The street was very quiet—it was a large thoroughfare—but the hour must have been nearly two in the morning.

"Where are you taking me?" I repeated.

"Home, sir, of course," replied the man. "I have your address, and it's all right. You sit quiet, sir."

"No, I won't, until you tell me where you are taking me," I answered. "How did I get into this hansom? You cannot drive me home, for you do not know my address."

"Ain't it St. John's Wood Avenue?" replied the man. "The gent, he said so. He gave me your card—Mr. George Cobb, 19, St. John's Wood Avenue."

"Nothing of the kind," I called back, in indignation. "My name is not Mr. George Cobb. Show me the card."

The man fumbled in his breast-pocket, and presently pushed a dirty piece of paste-board through the window. I thrust it into my pocket.

"And now tell me," I said, "how I got into this cab."

"Well, sir," he replied, after a brief moment of hesitation, "I am glad you're better—lor, it isn't anything to fret about—it happens to many and many a gent. You was dead drunk, and stretched on the pavement, sir, and an old gentleman with white 'air he come up and he looks at yer, and he shouts to me:—

"'Cabby,' says he, 'are you good for a job?'

"'Yes, sir,' I answers.

"'Well, then,' says he, 'you take this young gentleman 'ome. He's drunk, and ef the police see him, they'll lock him up—but ef you get down and give me a 'and, we'll get 'im into your 'ansom—and this is where he lives—at least, I suppose so, for this card was found on 'im.'

"'Right you air,' I says to the old gent, and between us we got you into the cab, and 'ere we are now a-driving back to St. John's Wood Avenue."

"Cabby, I have been the victim of the most awful plot, and—and," I continued,

feeling in my pockets excitedly, "I have been robbed—I only wonder I have not been murdered."

As I spoke I felt for my watch and chain—they had vanished. My valuable diamond ring, the motive, probably, of the whole horrible conspiracy, had been removed from my finger. My studs were gone, and what money I possessed—amounting, I am glad to say, to not more than £2 or £3—was no longer in my possession. The only wonder was why my life had been spared.

"Drive to the nearest police-station. I must give information without a moment's delay," I said to the cabman.

But that is the end of the adventure. Strange, incomprehensible as it may seem, from that day to this I have never solved the enigma of that dark house in that solitary square.

West, very far west, it lies, truly; so far that the police, whom I instantly put on the alert, could never from that day to now obtain the slightest clue to its whereabouts.

For aught that I can tell, Leonora Whitby and her father may be still pursuing their deadly work.

When I read in the papers of sudden and mysterious disappearances I invariably think of them, and wonder if the experiences of the victim who has vanished from all his familiar haunts have been anything like mine—if he has waited, as I waited, in that terrible lethal chamber, with its false books and its padded doors—if he has tasted the tortures of asphyxia and stared death in the face, but unlike me has never returned from the Vale of the Shadow.