

## Stories from the Diary of a Doctor.

By the Authors of "THE MEDICINE LADY."

### IV.—THE HEIR OF CHARTELPOOL.



DOCTOR in full practice in London often loses sight of his early home. This was not my case. I had spent all my young days in a small village in Yorkshire, and, as my practice

increased and my leisure time grew rarer and rarer, I was still glad to spend a fortnight in each year in the old sequestered hamlet which had known me as child and boy.

The thing which happens to all flesh came also into my life. The friends who knew me of old knew me no more, for the simple reason that they no longer knew anybody else on earth—they were lying in the churchyard. But one friend of about my own age always welcomed me with enthusiasm and heartiness when I could run down from London to spend a few days at Chartelpool.

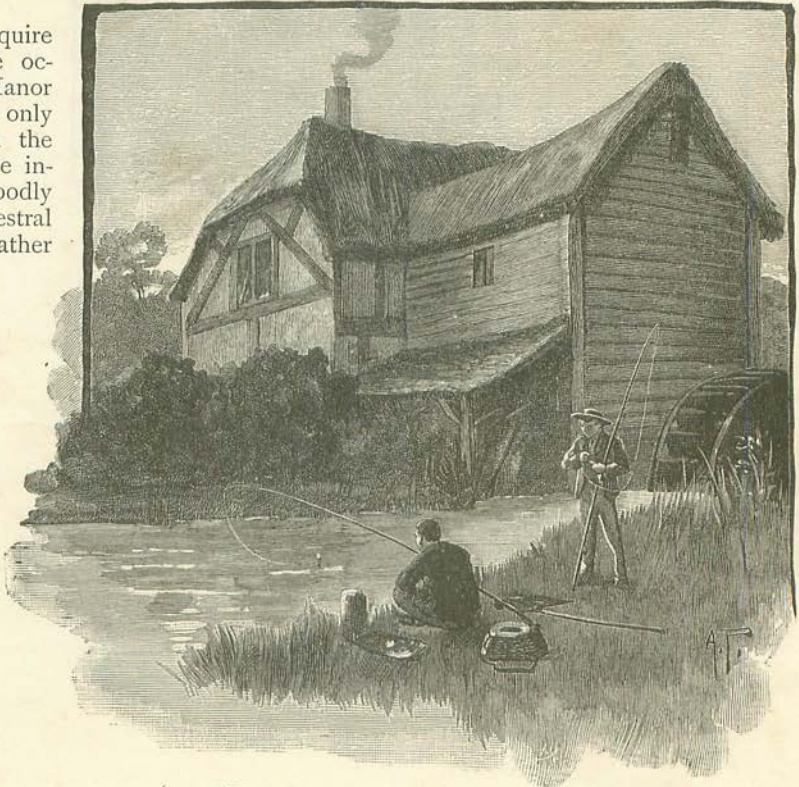
Stanhope was the squire of the village. He occupied the old Manor House, and was the only man of wealth in the neighbourhood. He inherited not only a goodly share of old ancestral acres, but his grandfather and father before him had largely added to their means by coal mines, which were worked successfully, and which, in consequence, made Harold Stanhope one of the richest men of my acquaintance.

When I first knew him he was a dark-eyed, sallow-faced schoolboy. We spent a great deal of time riding and fishing to-

gether, and when we both went up to the University, we found ourselves men of the same college.

Harold was reserved and silent—a little shy and difficult to get on with—at least, so strangers said, but I always thought him the best fellow on earth. The fact is, I had at quite an early age plumbed the depths of his nature, and knew what he was really worth.

He was a man of few words, but of sterling merit—honourable and upright as the day. His manners were somewhat cold and reserved, but he had a warm heart and the constancy of a Jacob. Harold, or Hal, as his more intimate friends generally called him, fell in love at an early age with a beautiful girl whom he happened to meet



"WE SPENT A GREAT DEAL OF TIME FISHING TOGETHER."

during his last term at Oxford. Kitty Clive was her name. She was of Irish extraction, and possessed all the charms, the impetuosity, and the fire of her countrywomen.

Hal fell head over ears in love with her, but for a long time he was a great deal too shy and too diffident of himself to tell her the fact. It was impossible for him to believe that beautiful Kitty could love so dull a fellow. This was his way of putting it. I was in his confidence from the first, and at last, I am glad to say, I induced him to put his fortunes to the test. He did so falteringly, and was amazed to find that Kitty adored him.

They were married soon after, and took up their abode at the old Manor House at Chartelpool, to be the delight and solace of the old Squire's life. He was an old man and a widower, and Hal was his only child. He survived the marriage exactly ten years, and then he died. I was present at his death-bed, for it was one of Hal's failings, or perhaps one of his weaknesses, to regard me as the best medical man of the day.

On this occasion, however, I was powerless to stay the hand of death. The Squire breathed his last in my presence, and I accompanied Harold when he laid his father in the family vault. On the night of the funeral I noticed a troubled expression on my friend's brow. I inferred, and rightly, that it was not only caused by sorrow at the loss he had sustained.

"What is it, Hal?" I said, suddenly. "You had better unburden yourself, old fellow."

"I mean to," said Harold, "although, perhaps, I oughtn't to bother you."

"What concerns you never bothers me," I retorted.

"Well, it's just this: my father on his death-bed spoke with great regret, and even bitterness, about the fact of our having no heirs to carry on the property. To tell the truth, I never bothered myself about the fact of our having no children. Kitty and I are all-sufficient to each other, and it was not until my father said something about the entail, and about the nature of the man who will inherit Chartelpool Manor whenever I die, that I saw the thing in a serious light. Kitty and I are married ten years now. We have no children, and are never likely to have any. Whenever I go, the place and the property descend to a man whose character and antecedents are as bad as bad can be. You have heard of Charles Stanhope, have you not, Halifax?"

"Rather!" I replied. "You don't mean

to tell me *that* dissolute fellow is the next heir?"

"It is true; 'pon my word I never realized the fact till my father spoke to me, and until his death and the reading of the will to-day put the whole thing in a clear and forcible light. Well, well, this is the sort of matter that no man can cure, and I only wish that I had not bothered you about it, Halifax."

I was silent for a moment, for in truth there was nothing to say. Then I uttered a few commonplaces, and presently the conversation was turned.

I went to town the next morning, and Stanhope and his affairs passed more or less out of sight in my own busy life. Judge, therefore, of my pleasure and astonishment when, about eighteen months afterwards, I received a telegram with the Chartelpool mark on it. It contained these words: "*Wife doing well. Fine boy arrived this morning.*"

The next day I got a long letter from my delighted friend, and was in due course asked to the christening.

I was too busy at the time to attend the ceremony, but as Hal also insisted on my standing sponsor, I told him that he must get a proxy to take my place, and sent down the handsomest silver-gilt mug I could purchase, to the heir of Chartelpool.

Months and even years passed by, and in the increasing duties and increasing interests which came in my way, I forgot Hal Stanhope and his joys and sorrows.

I had just taken a small house in Harley Street, was comfortably established there, and was looking forward to the possibility of extensive changes in my own *ménage*, when, entering the house late one winter's evening, I was suddenly confronted by the gaunt face and tall figure of my old friend Stanhope. My consulting-room was brightly lit up, and Hal's travel-stained face and intensely anxious expression seemed quite out of keeping with the neat room.

He rushed up to me when I appeared, and wrung one of my hands frantically.

"Thank God, you've come at last," he said, in a broken and hoarse voice. "I took the liberty to ask your servant to put up a few things in a bag for you. If we start immediately we shall be in time to catch the 6.30 train to the north. Come along, Guy, old man—I'll carry the bag, and we can walk down to the nearest cab-stand."

"No, no—what does this mean?" I exclaimed. "Are you out of your senses, Harold? We can't possibly rush off in this



"THANK GOD, YOU'VE COME AT LAST!"

frantic way. You must have something to eat before we start."

Harold seemed to swallow hard for a moment.

"Food would choke me," he said, with a gasp. "The boy—the boy is ill, Halifax. He met with an accident, fell downstairs. The local doctor, Eliot—Tom Eliot is his name, a right good fellow—he thinks badly of him. I have come for you; and we had better ask Parsons to follow by the next train. The boy is in danger. You see for yourself there is not one instant to lose."

My poor friend's manner was agitated and broken down to the last degree. As he uttered his disjointed sentences his voice shook. When he had finished speaking, he flung himself into a chair and pushed back his somewhat shaggy hair with a gesture which indicated mental anguish.

His words awoke in me a corresponding throb of the deepest sympathy. I was not only to be the doctor who was called to attend a case of extreme peril, but I was to save at any cost the only child of my dearest friend.

I pulled out my watch and looked at it hastily.

"It is not yet six o'clock," I said—"your train leaves at 6.30. We shall not take more than a quarter of an hour driving from here to King's Cross. We have two or three minutes, therefore, to discuss matters before leaving London. Try and tell me, as quietly and as quickly as you can, the nature of the injuries which the child has sustained."

"I don't know that I can. It's all confusion to me. The boy fell from a height down the stone stairs. It is a miracle that he was not killed on the spot."

"When did it happen?"

"This time yesterday."

"Who has attended him since the accident?"

"Our local doctor, Tom Eliot."

"You must be able to tell me, Harold, how

the boy is affected."

"I can't—I couldn't look at him. He has scarcely stirred or moved since the fall. Something wrong in the spine or brain, I believe. Oh! my God, he will die—I know he will die! Kitty says——"

"Yes?"

"I can't tell you—I feel all dazed."

Stanhope stood up as he spoke.

"Don't you think we'd better be starting?" he said.

"I have ordered a hansom," I replied, "and my servant has run round to see if Parsons is in, for it would greatly expedite matters if he could come down with us. And now you must have a glass of wine."

"I couldn't swallow it. If the hansom is at the door we had better drive to King's Cross. I wouldn't miss this train for the universe."

"You shan't miss it, my poor fellow. There! I hear a hansom stopping at the door; get into it, if it makes you happier. I must pack a few instruments which I may require. I'll join you in a twinkling."

Hal strode straight through the hall,

looking like a man who was half dazed and blind. He opened the hall-door, walked down the steps and entered the hansom. I hurried about, packed my case of surgical instruments, filled a flask with sherry and another with brandy, and was just going down my own steps when a servant ran up with a scrawl from Parsons.

I opened it, and read the following words by the lamplight: "*Meet you at King's Cross Station in time for 6.30 for the north.—J. Parsons.*"

I uttered an exclamation of relief, for I had secured the services of a man I considered one of the best surgeons of the day. I sprang into the hansom. "To King's Cross, as quick as you can," I shouted to the driver. The fleet horse bounded forward, and I turned to the distracted father by my side.

"Cheer up," I said, touching his hand for an instant; "Parsons will come north with us. The best surgical skill in the world will be at your boy's service."

Stanhope made no reply. I doubt very much if he even heard me. All the time that we were driving to King's Cross he kept bending forward and muttering half to himself, half for my benefit, "We'll be late: that brute of a horse is broken-winded. My God, we'll be late, we'll be late!"

"No," I said, suddenly. "There's a clock right in front of you. See for yourself what the hour is—scarcely ten minutes past six."

Stanhope glanced up in the direction to which I pointed. I noticed that his deep-set eyes were bloodshot, and had a wild gleam in them.

"Good heavens!" I murmured under my breath, "if the child dies, my poor friend is extremely likely to lose his reason."

A few minutes later we drew up at the great station for the north. Hal immediately took my arm and dragged me forward to the ticket office. He had a return ticket for himself, and after purchasing a first-class for me, he again seized my arm and rushed on in the direction of the train.

"You are forgetting your change," I said.

"Confound the change!" he retorted.

I waited for an instant, detached myself from him, ran back, secured the change out of a £10 note, and was once more at his side. To my immense relief I saw Parsons's well-known figure waiting for us on the platform.

"Now, Stanhope," I said, as sternly as I could speak, "pull yourself together. There is no good whatever to be gained by the excitement you are showing."

"I can't help it, Guy, old boy. If you had seen Kitty's face!"

"My dear chap, I can realize a little of your feeling; but do try and calm yourself, for the sake of your Kitty and your boy. Now let us speak to Parsons. He is standing just opposite to us, with a porter holding his bag. Let him see that you have the courage to keep quiet."

My words had a salutary effect. Hal became less wild and *distract*, and the great assurance and the intense calm of Parsons's manner did much to steady his nerves. Our train was waiting for us; we took our seats. I tipped the guard to give us a compartment to ourselves, and a few moments later we were speeding away to the north. We arrived at Chartelpool station between ten and eleven that night. A close carriage had been sent for us, and we drove quickly in the direction of the Manor. It was a somewhat long drive and all up-hill, but Stanhope's restlessness, I was glad to see, had completely vanished. He now sat in absolute silence, with his back to the horses, and never once attempted to join in the conversation which Parsons and I kept up together.

As we were driving quickly through the hamlet of Chartelpool, the red glow of a blacksmith's forge shone out across the road. It was a late hour for the blacksmith to be busy, but the sound of his ponderous hammer was distinctly heard. His brawny arms flashed into view, and a shower of living sparks surrounded him. A man was leaning up against the door of the shed, and a horse was tied by a halter close by.

The moment he saw us the man started forward, and put an ugly face up to the carriage window.

"Halloa, Squire!" he shouted, addressing Stanhope. "How's the kid this evening, eh? Better?"

Stanhope made no reply, but a look of intense repulsion passed over his features. He knew the man, and so did I. In case the little boy died he was the heir to Chartelpool Manor. We drove out of sight, and Hal broke the silence by saying suddenly:—

"You recognised that fellow, didn't you, Guy?"

"Yes," I answered. "Has he come to live here?"

"Yes, he has taken the tumble-down old Grange, a place at my very gates, as you know. He lives here now, with a brood of sons as disreputable as himself. They have changed the whole aspect of the place. My God, my God, how I hate the fellow!"



"HOW'S THE KID THIS EVENING, EH."

Hal covered his face and groaned. Parsons looked at me significantly. A few minutes later we had arrived at our destination, and were taken immediately to Stanhope's study, where Eliot, the local practitioner who had charge of the case, awaited us. He gave us a brief account of the accident and described the child's present condition.

"We will go up to see him now," said Parsons, in his brief, concise voice. We went upstairs and entered the splendid and spacious nurseries occupied by the sick child.

He was in the inner nursery, lying on a little white bed, which had been drawn almost into the centre of the room. His mother stood at the head of the bed, with her hands clasped, and a long, white dressing-gown covering her from her throat to her feet. Her face was as white as her dress. She came forward to greet both Parsons and myself, offering us both a hand, but not uttering a syllable.

"Will you leave us for a little?" I said to the mother. "We will come to you as soon as we have made our examination and formed our verdict."

"I would rather stay with the child," she said.

I glanced round at Stanhope. It would be difficult to force the mother to leave her apparently dying child, and yet we could not conduct our examination to the best advantage in her presence. He understood me, strode forward and touched his wife on her arm.

"Come, Kitty," he said. "You can come back as soon as ever the doctors have given their verdict. It is but fair now to leave them alone with the child."

She did not utter another word of remonstrance, but placed her hand with a touching sort of submission in Stanhope's. He led her immediately from the room.

It was not until she was gone that I ventured to take a long look at the little heir of Chartelpool. He had evidently scarcely moved or shown the faintest signs of life since the moment of the accident. His lovely cherub face looked as if it were carved in marble; his round arms and small hands were bare. An aureole of bright hair surrounded his forehead. He was a noble-looking child—sturdy of limb and of great size for his age.

Eliot began to describe the nature of the accident. Parsons listened attentively, and then the work of examination began. We turned the child very tenderly on his face and hands, the spine was carefully felt by the sensitive fingers of the surgeon. The little head was tapped here and there. Then the child was laid once more on his back, and Parsons, sitting down, motioned to us to do likewise.

"There is evidently severe injury to the brain," he began. "I should say there is a fracture of the base of the skull, accompanied with hemorrhage."

He paused here. His next words came out slowly.

"And yet, serious as all this is," he continued, "I think the child may survive if the hemorrhage is not progressing. I have seen similar cases recover, but the worst of it is that in children there is a great fear that the recovery will be with impaired intellect, more

or less complete. Were the hemorrhage over the vault of the cranium, and one had any indication as to its region, I would trephine and relieve the pressure, but I fear there is no doubt the serious injury is beyond our reach. There is nothing whatever for it but simply to wait and see; but I feel that I must say, though there is a distinct hope of the child's slow recovery to life, the condition of his intellect will be permanently impaired. Such has always been my experience. At the present moment, as you must both know well, the child is in a most precarious condition, and it is impossible to say anything very definite as to the outcome one way or another. Anyhow, there is nothing whatever to be done but to wait events."

"I cannot agree with you," I interrupted, eagerly. "I am of opinion that the injury is to the upper surface of the brain. That is the cause of the serious mischief, though I admit there is probably shock and concussion at the base."

I then described the symptoms which led me to this conclusion, and strongly advocated a trephining operation, even if only with a view to exploring in search of the impaired spot.

"No," replied Parsons; "the injury is, I am certain, to the base of the brain, and surgical interference would be worse than useless. It would not only be of no avail as far as relief is concerned, but would positively add to the danger already existing. Of course, I have every hope that the boy may partially recover. His intellect will never be the same, however."

"Good heavens!" I could not help exclaiming. "Is the boy to become an idiot? An idiot, and heir to all these estates; an idiot, and the son

of Harold and Kitty Stanhope! Death would be better. I wish you would consider the possibility of trephining, Parsons."

"I cannot counsel it," he answered. "The risk would be too great. Were there any definite ground to go on, and did I know the exact spot where the injury has taken place, I might dare to try it, but even then not without the parents' complete sanction. You must remember that this operation cannot be performed on the part of the brain which I believe to be affected."

"I have performed the operation on the dead," I said, "but not yet, it is true, on a living subject."

"Well, it would be useless in this case," said the surgeon, with a little heat. He rose as he spoke. "Nothing can be done," he said, in a decided tone, "but to wait events. Now we had better see the poor parents."

We went downstairs. I shall never forget the scene that followed; it is absolutely impossible for me to describe it. The silent anguish of the mother—her perfect self-control, her attitude, the way she looked at Stanhope, the way she approached his chair and laid her hand on one of his shoulders.



"SHE LAID HER HAND ON ONE OF HIS SHOULDERS"

As for him, poor fellow, he was completely overcome, and when Parsons had to break the cruel tidings that even at the best the noble boy must live with an impaired intellect, and that there was a strong possibility of his not surviving the accident, Stanhope covered his face with his big hands and absolutely sobbed aloud.

As long as I live, I shall never forget the sound of that awful weeping, wrung from a strong man in his agony. Even Parsons, who looked as if he were made of iron, was visibly affected. He turned his head aside and muttered into my ear:—

“My God! I can’t stand any more of this—I shall return to town by the next train.”

I felt incapable of saying a word to induce him to delay his departure. At that moment I felt more than annoyed with him. He showed, in my opinion, a cautiousness which amounted almost to cowardice. Under the circumstances, a rasher man would have ventured to perform the operation which alone could give little Hal Stanhope back his reason. I remembered now, when too late, that Parsons was always remarkable for his overcarefulness, and regretted that I had not brought Fieldman down to see the child.

Eliot and I accompanied the surgeon into the hall, we had a few last words together, and then the sounds of the carriage wheels were heard as they bore him away in time to catch the midnight train to town.

I went back to the room where we had left the father and mother, and Eliot went upstairs to watch by the sick child’s bed. Stanhope was now the sole occupant of the large dining-room, and I guessed that his wife had returned to the child. He had partly recovered from the intense emotion which he had exhibited in Parsons’s presence, and was now walking restlessly up and down in front of the hearth.

“Sit down and have some supper, Guy,” he said to me. “Help yourself, old fellow.”

“You will eat with me?” I queried.

“I could not swallow food; don’t ask me,” he said, with a shake of his head.

I saw it was useless to press him at that moment, and seating myself at the table I made a short meal. I can truly say that the food tasted like ashes in my mouth. When I had finished eating, Hal sat down by me and to my surprise began to ask me questions with regard to the boy.

“Tell me exactly what Parsons said over again,” he remarked. “I heard the words, of course, at the time, but they were so

mixed up with a singing in my ears, and a drumming round the region of my heart, that I could listen to nothing distinctly. I am quieter now and can hear what you say. Tell me the truth, Guy.”

“The truth is simply this,” I answered: “the child suffers from serious injuries of the brain and spine. These are causing insensibility and paralysis. The paralysis is of a nature which is not necessarily fatal, and the possibilities are that after a time a certain amount of consciousness will return, and by-and-by he will be able to use his limbs again.”

“The brain will be all right, of course?” queried Hal. “I’ve a confused idea that Parsons said something dreadful about the future condition of the brain; but perhaps I made a mistake. With the sort of shock which I was suffering from at the time such a mistake is highly probable—eh, Guy, eh?”

He looked at me with such intense eagerness, I thought the cruellest moment in my life had come when I was obliged to shake my head.

“You heard correctly, my poor fellow,” I said. “The injury to the brain is so extensive that even should the paralysis and insensibility pass off gradually, the higher centres are some of them sure to be affected; and, as Parsons said, more or less of mental impairment is, I fear, certain.”

“My God!” said Hal. “In other words, that means that the boy will be an idiot.”

“It may not be quite so bad as that,” I said, in a faint voice.

“Yes, yes, Guy—I know better. I saw the truth in the surgeon’s eyes—I read it now in your face. The heir of Chartelpool will be an idiot. God help us! God help his mother and me!”

I was silent—I had not a word to say. It would have been cruel to attempt even a word of sympathy.

“Still, he’ll be heir of Chartelpool,” continued Hal.

“That is true,” I answered, wondering that he could turn to such a fact for consolation.

“And that brute of a Charles Stanhope and his sons are cut out,” he continued. “*That* is a comfort—it is more than a comfort.”

He went up to the supper-table as he spoke, poured out a large glass of brandy, added a very little water to it, and gulped it down.

“And Parsons can do nothing for the child?” he said, facing round on me.

"He says there is nothing to be done," I retorted. "I almost wish now that I had brought Fieldman to see the child."

"In the name of Heaven, why? Is not Parsons the first man in his profession?"

"Undoubtedly one of the first, but he is cautious. In my opinion he is too cautious."

"What do you mean?"

"There is an operation which might be performed on the child, which, if successful, would restore him to perfect health."

"Then, in Heaven's name, why isn't it done?"

"Parsons thinks the risk too great."

"What risk?"

"The risk to life."

"Is the operation so critical?"

"It is; if it failed—and Parsons considers that in this case it would be sure to fail—the boy would die."

"Ah, and Charlie Stanhope would be heir! That settles the point. We must not run the risk."

"If the boy were mine, I should perform the operation," I said.

"What do you mean?"

"It is my conviction that he would stand it. But I must not urge you. The risk is too momentous."

"It is, Guy, it is. The operation must not be thought of. There is no gainsaying an opinion like Parsons's."

"I believe Fieldman would have attempted it. If the case were mine, I should counsel Fieldman being telegraphed for even now."

"No, no, better not," interrupted Hal. "Life at any cost—life at any cost must be preserved. The risk is too tremendous. Let us abide by Parsons's verdict."

At this moment Mrs. Stanhope entered the room. She overheard her husband's last words, and came up to him at once. The deathly pallor of her face was almost startling. Her patient eyes were hard in their glassy brightness.

"What are you talking about?" she asked, leaning her hand as she spoke on Stanhope's shoulder.

He was seated by the table. He turned back and slipped his arm round her waist.

"We are talking about the boy, of course," he said. "Halifax has been repeating Parsons's opinion to me over again."



"HE SLIPPED HIS ARM ROUND HER WAIST."

"It is impossible to believe that opinion," said the mother. "Our noble boy an idiot! Great surgeons are often wrong, and this one will be proved to have made a frightful error, I am firmly convinced."

"No, no, Kitty," said Stanhope. "Men like Parsons never make mistakes."

"That is not true," she said, turning to me. "You have known of such cases, have you not, Dr. Halifax?"

"I have," I answered, emphatically.

She gave her husband a swift glance of the saddest triumph it was possible to witness.

"Has Mr. Parsons gone?" she asked, after a moment's pause.

"Yes," replied Stanhope; "he could do no possible good by remaining."

"I am sorry he came down," she said, with sudden passion. "We did not want our boy's



doom pronounced and nothing, nothing at all, done for his recovery."

"But it is a comfort, it is a sort of comfort at least to know that the child may live, Kitty," said Stanhope. "At least that brute of a Charlie Stanhope will be cut out."

"Who cares about that?" she said, stamping her foot. "Mr. Parsons has gone, having done nothing. Dr. Halifax, have you no measures to propose for the child's relief?"

"There is an operation which Fieldman might perform," I began at once.

"Fieldman!" she interrupted. "I have heard of him. He is a very great surgeon, indeed." Her eyes began to blaze with renewed hope.

"You would like Mr. Fieldman to be sent for, Dr. Halifax?"

"Yes," I replied; "but Hal here thinks otherwise."

Stanhope suddenly stood up. He put one arm round his wife and drew her to his side.

"This is the state of the case, Kitty," he said. "Parsons has pronounced the boy fairly safe as far as life is concerned; his intellect will be impaired, of course, but we cannot go into that point at the present moment. The main and most important fact is that the boy will live. Now, Halifax knows of an operation, which, if successful, would save his intellect."

"Ah! then it must be done," said Kitty Stanhope.

"Listen to me, my darling," said her husband. "Parsons thinks the operation will kill the boy. He does not wish it to be attempted. We must not risk it, my love."

"We must," she repeated. "There are no two questions in the matter. The operation must be attempted."

"Not at the risk of the boy's life. What can you be dreaming about, Kitty?"

"Do you call the existence you have just spoken of life?" she retorted, with sudden passion. "I love the child. He is my only one. He is my treasure beyond price. But I don't care to bestow such a life as Mr. Parsons spoke of on him. Better, far better, let him die. We will risk the operation."

"Kitty, you forget that brute Charlie Stanhope."

"I do," she answered, promptly. "He is nothing to me. As far as I am concerned he does not exist. Chartelpool is nothing to me. The boy—the boy with his bright spirit unclouded, either here or with the angels, that is everything. Hal, I beg of you to allow the operation to be performed."

"Kitty, my darling, I cannot. The risk is

too tremendous. I cannot consent to its being run."

Stanhope was making a great effort to speak quietly; but there was a suppressed fire in his manner which I had never before witnessed.

"Leave us for a little, Dr. Halifax," said Mrs. Stanhope, flashing a quick glance at me.

I went out of the room and upstairs to the child's nursery. Eliot was seated by the bed. The beautiful little marble figure lay there stretched out, flat and still, motionless as though he were his own effigy on a tombstone.

"I wish to God," I said, as I glanced at him, "that I had brought Fieldman down! I am sure Fieldman would have attempted to trephine, and so relieve the pressure. I am certain Parsons is wrong with regard to the spot where the injury exists. As it is, Harold Stanhope has taken fright and will not permit any risk to be run."

"It would be highly dangerous, I have no doubt," said Eliot.

"I agree with the mother," I retorted. "The mother would risk the operation. I admire her pluck beyond words."

I had a little further conversation with Eliot and then left the room. I was standing in the outer nursery when Mrs. Stanhope entered and passed me swiftly by without even bestowing a glance upon me. The intense marble calm of her face was broken. It was now disfigured by the marks of tears. I saw that she had been crying bitterly. She re-entered the boy's room and I went downstairs.

Neither Hal nor I thought of going to bed, although, after a time, he lay down on the sofa and slept heavily until the morning. I shall never forget the leaden weight, the awful tedium of the day which followed. I had promised to remain with Stanhope until that miserable apology for life which Parsons anticipated returned to the child.

There was no change whatever—no touch of returning consciousness during the long hours of this day. The deep insensibility in which the little fellow lay was absolutely unbroken. To an inexperienced eye it must almost have seemed as if the boy's spirit had already fled. All day long Mrs. Stanhope remained by his side. What little she ate or drank was taken there. She had completely recovered her still composure. Her calm was marvellous, although now and then I noticed that her lips moved as if she were praying about something. Once, towards evening, she followed me out of the nursery.

"Do you think the child worse?" she asked.

"No," I answered; "he is in precisely the same condition he was in when we arrived yesterday."

"You think he will recover?" she continued, fixing her eyes on me.

"There are certain signs which lead me to think he will not die," I replied, somewhat evasively.



"DO YOU THINK THE CHILD WORSE?"

"But I am praying very earnestly that he may die," she answered. "I don't wish him to retain the sort of death in life which Mr. Parsons has prophesied for him."

"It may not be so bad as you fear," I answered.

She shook her head, gave me a broken-hearted glance, and returned immediately to the sick room. I now knew why her lips moved so often—she was praying for the child's death.

Soon afterwards, unable to endure the awful tedium of the house, I went out for a stroll. I walked through the village, and regretted very much that I had done so, when on my way home I was met by that disreputable person, Charles Stanhope, who immediately insisted on joining me.

He was half tipsy, and any shadow of compunction which he might possibly feel in addressing the Squire of Chartelpool was naturally absent from his manner when he merely spoke to the doctor.

"Hooray!" he began. "So I'm to be heir after all! The kid hasn't a leg to stand on. I believe if you told me the truth, doctor, that his death is expected each moment."

"Nothing of the kind," I answered, promptly. (For the first time I felt quite inclined to indorse Stanhope's views that this wretch must be kept out of possession at any cost.)

"The boy will not die," I repeated; "you can take a doctor's word for that."

I strode quickly away, and heard the brute hurling curses after me as I went down the avenue. I said nothing to Hal of my interview with his enemy, and as we were both tired out, and there was nothing whatever to be done for the child but simply to wait the issue of events, we both retired at an early hour to our rooms.

While I remained downstairs I had been the victim of the most overpowering drowsiness. There come such moments in the lives of all people. There come hours when the simple desire for natural sleep triumphs over sorrow, over anxiety, over mental pain. The physical is stronger at such a time than the mental. The body is worn out—rest it must. Thus criminals sleep on the eve of execution.

The desire for slumber had visited me in this overwhelming manner while I remained downstairs. I scarcely heard Stanhope while he conversed. The pathetic figure of the child who lay in living death became blurred and indistinct to my mental view.

I went gladly upstairs, entered my room, shut the door, and prepared for slumber. Strange! Incomprehensible! At this moment I became wide awake. All wish for sleep left me. I was intensely, painfully wakeful.

I sat down in an armchair and waited for sleep to visit me. I perceived that it had no intention of doing so; there was, therefore, not the least use in my going to bed. In my present wakeful state I must think of something, and what more natural than for me to turn my thoughts to the operation which might be performed on little Hal Stanhope, and which would, if successful, save his life in that full sense which makes it a pleasure to live?

I had performed the operation of trephining in every possible region of the head, but only on the dead body. I had seen it done

in hospital, however, and it had occupied my thoughts long ago as a possible means of relieving pressure even near the base of the brain.

As I thought it all over I felt more and more convinced that Parsons was wrong, and that the injury was in a region where trephining could be successfully performed. I felt almost daring enough to attempt it. I had brought all the necessary instruments with me in my surgical case. The operation could be performed at this very hour, and the boy might be safe in the morning.

So strong was the impulse which came over me to risk everything, that I felt almost inclined to rush off to Stanhope and wring a consent from him. I knew the mother would give hers without the least difficulty. Impelled by an almost uncontrollable impulse, I rose from my chair—then again I sat down. Parsons's words, uttered with such conviction and solemnity, returned to me. The operation might be performed truly, and the boy might be dead in the morning. Then my old friend would curse me, and I should feel like a murderer to my dying day.

No, I must not risk the performance of so critical an operation unaided. If Fieldman were here the case would be different.

Before I lay down to rest I looked carefully through my case of instruments. They were all bright and ready for use. I left them on the table, laid my head on the pillow, and found that, when I was not particularly thinking about it, sleep visited me. In a few moments I was wrapped in the deepest repose.

After a time, I don't know when, I began to dream. My dream was distinct, direct, and vivid. Most dreams have a certain confusion about them. This had not any.

I dreamt that a great impelling Power visited me: a Presence unseen but most surely felt. The Power or Presence gave implicit directions, which I implicitly obeyed. Under its guidance, I rose from my bed, dressed myself completely, opened the door of my room and went out. I went into the

sick room, where I knew I should find Eliot. The mother was lying on a sofa in the room. She was in a dead sleep, and looked completely worn out. The child was still nothing more than a marble effigy.

"Eliot," I said, in my dream, "I am going to perform the operation of trephining immediately, and I want your assistance."

"You must be mad," replied Eliot.

"No, I am not mad," I answered. "I am perfectly sane. Come into the next room—I must speak to you."

Eliot followed me. Dissatisfaction and incredulity were written very plainly on his



"COMPLETELY WORN OUT."

face. I made use of words to him which struck me at the time as not in the least like my own. Then I felt that the invisible Power was speaking through me, and I knew that Eliot must yield to the influence which was completely overmastering me.

I saw that his face became animated and even enthusiastic. He seized me by my hand and wrung it.

"Get the mother's leave, and I will help you," he said. "I believe in you, by Jove I do. Get the mother to consent, and I will help you with all my might and main."

In my dream I saw him return to the sick child's nursery. In a moment he returned, accompanied by Mrs. Stanhope.

"I want you to consent to my performing an operation on the child," I said. "I am

certain I shall be successful. Will you allow me to try?"

She looked at me with wide-open, almost dazed eyes. All of a sudden I saw life and hope spring back to them.

"Yes, yes," she said; "I trust you—I believe in you. I consent—be the consequences what they may."

She rushed back to the nursery and began to make preparations. I went to fetch my instruments and Eliot got the chloroform.

With Eliot's aid, then, and with the assistance of the mother—who, with pale face and compressed lips, and with the nerve of a surgical nurse, rendered me all necessary help—I felt myself performing the operation. My hands were as cool and firm as iron. I had not a tremor; not a moment's hesitation. The trephining was performed successfully, and the clot which produced pressure on the vault of the brain (I was right after all as to the locality) successfully removed. The child sighed once or twice during the operation. I felt sure that he would do well. Then in my dream I saw myself returning to my bed, and worn out, I sank into the repose which I had duly earned.

I had no more dreams, and when I awoke at a late hour the following morning it was to see the winter's daylight struggling into the room. The instant I opened my eyes I remembered my dream, and wished heartily that it was true. I made a fervent resolve, even in the moment of awakening, to speak to Stanhope on the subject, and with his permission to telegraph for Fieldman without an hour's delay. Just then a voice spoke to me—I turned on my pillow with a start of surprise, for Eliot was standing by my bedside.

"Am I wanted?" I said. "Have I overslept myself? Is the child worse?"

"I came to tell you that the child is decidedly better," he replied, "and Mrs. Stanhope is most anxious that you should not get up until you are really rested. I never saw a man, in all my life, look so worn out as you did when you went to bed."

"Well, you see, I had no sleep the night before," I answered, but Eliot's words surprised me—I thought them exaggerated, and hastened to add:—

"At any rate, I am perfectly rested now."

"Well, don't hurry up," he replied. "We'll send for you if there is the least occasion."

"What do you mean by the child being better?" I asked. "If so, if there is the least return of consciousness, I ought to be with the little fellow at once."

I sprang up in bed.

"Has the miserable life foretold by Parsons begun to return to the boy?" I asked. "In that case the improvement will be very, very gradual."

"What are you talking about, Halifax?" exclaimed Eliot. "The child is better, because, in my opinion, the operation has been a success."

For a moment I could find no words to speak. Then I gasped out in an incredulous, weak sort of voice, "What operation?"

"Surely, Halifax, you must have taken leave of your senses," replied Eliot, staring at me in astonishment, as well he might. "Don't you remember what you did last night?"

"I slept last night," I said, "I slept—and my God, I dreamed! But what of that?"

"Don't you know what you did between the hours of two and four?"

Eliot looked at me now with undisguised alarm.

"It must have been about then I had my dream," I said, sinking back in a state of tremor on my pillow.

"What in the world are you thinking of, man?" said Eliot, almost angrily. "Wake at least now and listen to me. You must know perfectly well what you did—how you occupied the time between the hours of two and four. You had no dream, Halifax; you were as wide awake, as cool, as collected as man could be. I never admired anyone in the whole course of my life as I admired you last night. You will be the first surgeon of your day. I never saw a surgeon, in hospital or out, with the skill, precision, and nerve that you have exhibited."

"I am speaking the truth, I assure you," I answered, "when I tell you that I am only conscious of having had a very vivid dream during the night. Kindly put me out of suspense and tell me what I really did."

Eliot's look of admiration was now changed to one of pity. "Poor fellow!" I heard him mutter, "no wonder his brain should be a little dazed this morning. But to forget all about it; that is most extraordinary. I hope to goodness there is nothing seriously wrong with him!"

"For Heaven's sake, speak!" I cried. "What, in the name of all that is extraordinary, have I done?"

"You performed the operation which Parsons would not attempt on little Harold Stanhope."

"Never!" I exclaimed, springing to my feet.



"FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, SPEAK!"

"Fact, I assure you."

"Tell me about it," I asked, almost feebly.

"Well, this is a most extraordinary case," began Eliot.

"Tell me about it," I repeated, clutching him by the arm. "If you don't want me to go stark, staring mad—tell me the whole story, without a moment's delay."

"I will do so. Keep cool, try and keep cool," repeated Eliot.

He then began, in a matter-of-fact voice, which it was extremely difficult to doubt, to speak as follows:—

"The clock had just struck two—I was sitting in the nursery and watching the boy. You came in, looking particularly resolute. You said briefly and firmly, 'I am going to perform the operation, and you must help me.' I was staggered, and asked you if you were mad.

"For reply, you took me by the arm and seemed to sweep me with you into the next room.

"'I am convinced the operation will be a success,' you said. 'I have thought over this case ever since I came down, and I am now convinced that the injury is within comparatively easy reach. Certain symptoms have given me a clue to the spot, and if I reach it there must be relief. I can see it in my mind's eye, and it will be an easy matter.

As surely as I stand before you, Eliot, the child will recover perfectly if the operation is performed.'

"'We can do nothing without at least one of the parents' consent,' I replied.

"'Then get the mother's,' you answered. 'She is lying down in the next room. Wake her and bring her here. She is a sane woman and a brave one. She will consent, not the least doubt of it. Go; be quick; each moment is precious.'

"I rushed away. I awakened Mrs. Stanhope. She tottered to her feet. I supported her into the room where you stood, looking inspired. The

forcible words you had used to me you repeated to the mother. Your look, your manner, your tone impressed us both. In short, you carried us away on the wings of your enthusiasm. You felt inspired yourself; you inspired us both with such hope that we forgot fear. Before you had done speaking I turned to Mrs. Stanhope and begged of her to consent. I had no need to do so. Her eyes told me that she had consented already.

"'There is the boy's father,' I said, but I uttered the words feebly.

"'I take the responsibility on myself,' said the mother. 'When the danger is past, he will thank me when he thanks you, Dr. Halifax.'

"'There is not a moment to lose,' you repeated, as though you scarcely heard her words.

"'I will make ready, and I will stand by you and help you all the time,' she replied.

"She went back to the night nursery, and you rushed away to fetch your instruments. When you came back she had placed a table, lights, and all things necessary for your use quite handy. While you were performing the operation she stood without flinching by your side, and acted like a trained assistant. From the beginning to the end it occupied exactly one hour. I never saw anything

done more neatly, more thoroughly. Towards the end the child moved his right hand and sighed twice heavily.

"When all was over, and when, under ordinary circumstances, you would have sat down to watch the patient, you seemed suddenly to collapse. You told me, I will confess something to my surprise at the moment, that you wished to go back to your room. I looked into your face, and saw that you were *done*—there is no other word for it. You staggered rather than walked to the door. I never saw anyone look so worn out."

"No wonder!" I ejaculated. "Eliot, I performed that operation in my sleep!"

"No, no," he answered, in agitation. "You can't get me to believe that: you were wide awake. I never saw anyone with more complete control of his faculties."

"I was fast asleep," I answered; "I dreamt it all. I remember each thing you have told me. I dreamt it all. My God! I evidently did more than dream. Can this be true? But, no, you must be mocking me."

"Not I; here are your instruments not yet cleaned. Look at them, and then come and see the child. The child is much better."

"For God's sake, leave me to myself for a little," I said. "If this is not all a dream, it is the most marvellous case of somnambulism that has ever yet been recorded. Leave me alone for a little, Eliot. I'll get dressed somehow and join you in the sick room; that is, if I don't go mad in the meantime."

"Not you," said Eliot. "If you were really asleep, you may congratulate yourself on having done a more successful operation than I ever saw performed by waking man. Keep cool, Halifax. I can only say that, awake or asleep, Providence must have guided your movements last night."

Eliot left the room, and I sat for a moment with my head pressed against my hands. I did not believe the story—and yet a glance at the instruments on the table could not fail to convince me.

Then I dressed with frantic speed, plunged my head into cold water two or three times, and, tolerably collected at last, but feeling as if I were half-a-dozen years older, I went into the sick room. There lay the little fellow with his pretty eyes open—a faint

dawning smile round his lips, and a slight colour coming back to his cheeks.

There sat the mother, bending over him as if she were worshipping him; and there stood Hal, with his face all disfigured as if he had just had a great crying bout. When I appeared, he made two strides towards me, put a big hand on each shoulder and pushed me towards the dressing-room.

"Good God! Halifax," he said. "What craze came over you, old chap?"

"It's all right now," I said. "But—just for my own satisfaction, for the boy is quite out of danger—I should like you to send for Fieldman. I want to tell him the whole story, and to give him my reasons for differing from Parsons."

"I'll send for all the surgeons in London, if you wish it."

"No, Hal," I said, trying to speak steadily and to recover myself, for I was really in a frightful state of maze. "But the fact is, I have done a most extraordinary thing, and I want Fieldman to see my work and to hear my story. I performed the operation in my sleep, Hal, old fellow."

"So they tell me. What care I whether you did it awake or asleep? You saved the boy—I don't care how you did it, Halifax. You're the best fellow on earth—bar none!"

"Well, I should like to see Fieldman," I answered, sinking into a chair.

We telegraphed for the great surgeon, who arrived that evening. To him I confided the whole extraordinary story. He heard me to the end, refused to commit himself with regard to Parsons, but looked anxiously at me, felt my pulse, and looked into my eyes.

"You must take a month's holiday, or your nerves will be going wrong," he said. "Fact, I assure you. You must go away at once."

"Before I stir a step," I answered, "you must give me your opinion of the boy."

"All right, stay where you are; I'll come back to you."

He was absent a little over half an hour.

"The operation is absolutely successful," he said. "The boy will recover perfectly. He will be as well as ever he was. All he needs now is quiet and rest. By Jove, you did an extraordinary thing, Halifax. A most unaccountable and successful thing. Only listen to me. In the name of science, don't repeat it!"