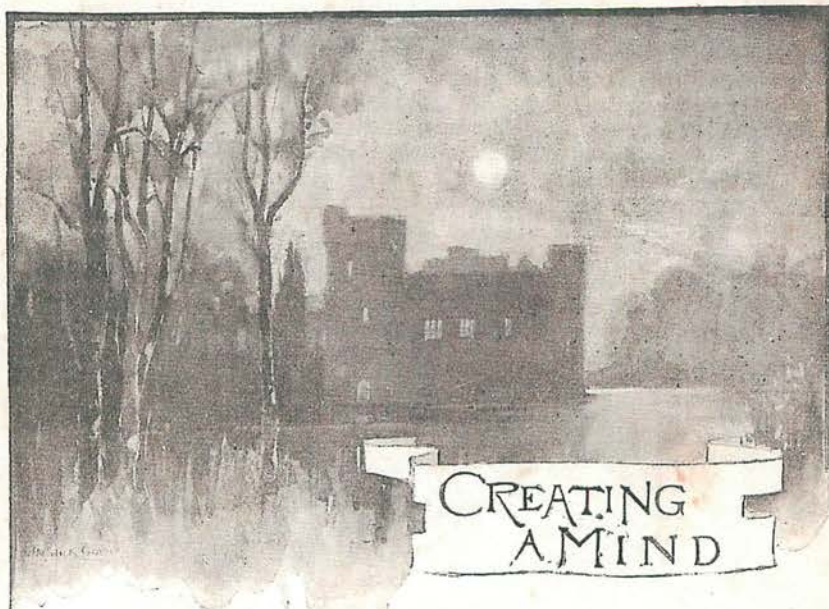


Stories from the Diary of a Doctor.

SECOND SERIES.



HARTLEY CASTLE.

BY L. T. MEADE AND CLIFFORD HALIFAX, M.D.

[These stories are written in collaboration with a medical man of large experience. Many are founded on fact, and all are within the region of practical medical science. Those stories which may convey an idea of the impossible are only a forecast of an early realization.]



THE extraordinary story which I am about to tell happened a few years ago. I was staying for a short time in a small village in Warwickshire, and was called up suddenly one evening to see the Squire of the place, who had met with a bad accident and was lying in an almost unconscious condition at his own house. The local doctor happened to be away, and my services were eagerly demanded. Under the circumstances, there was nothing for it but to comply. I stepped into the brougham sent for me to the village inn, and, after a very short drive, found myself at Hartley Castle. It was an ancient, castellated pile, and village gossip had already informed me that it had been the property of the Norreys family for hundreds of years. The night was a bright and moonlight one in July, and as I drove down the straight avenue and passed under a deep archway into a large courtyard, I caught my first distinct view of the house.

As soon as ever the carriage drew up at the front door an old servant in livery flung it open, and I saw in the background a lady waiting with some nervousness to receive me.

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She came forward at once, and held out her hand.

"Dr. Halifax, I presume?"

I bowed.

"I have heard of you," she said. "It is a lucky chance for us that brings you to Hartley just now. I am Miss Norreys. My father was thrown from his horse two hours ago. He seems to be very ill, and is unable to move. When he was first discovered lying in the avenue he was unconscious, but he is able to speak now, and knows what is going on—he seems, however, to be in great discomfort, in short——" she broke off abruptly, and her thin, colourless face turned paler.

"Can I see the patient?" I interrupted.

"Oh, yes," she replied; "I will take you to him immediately—come this way, please."

I followed Miss Norreys up some shallow stairs, which led into the Squire's bedroom.

I found my patient stretched flat in the centre of the bed. A manservant and an elderly woman, whom Miss Norreys addressed as Connor, were standing at a little distance. One of the windows was thrown open for air, and the bed-curtains were flung back.

When I approached him, Squire Norreys

fixed two rather fierce and strained black eyes upon my face—he was breathing with extreme difficulty, and it required but a brief glance to show me that he was suffering from injury to the spinal cord.

I bent over my patient and asked him a few questions. He replied to them in a perfectly rational manner, although his words came out slowly and with effort. He gave me a brief account of the accident, and said that his last conscious impression was falling somewhat heavily near the nape of the neck. When he recovered consciousness, he found himself lying in bed.

"What is the matter with me?" he asked, when he had finished making his brief statement.

"You are suffering from injury to the spinal cord," I answered. "I cannot tell yet what the extent of your injuries may be, but I hope they are not very serious, and that after a time your most uncomfortable symptoms will abate."

"I find it hard to breathe," he said, with a gasp. Then he closed his eyes, being evidently too exhausted for further conversation.

Miss Norreys asked me to come with her into another room. I did so, and when there briefly described the case to her.

"My opinion is, that the paralysis will pass off before long," I said. "I do not think that any serious effusion of blood into the spinal cord has taken place. The brain, too, is absolutely clear, which is an excellent symptom. Of course, if the Squire is not better to-morrow, I should like to consult a specialist—now there is nothing to be done but to apply the simple remedies which I have ordered, and to watch him."

"I will sit up," said Miss Norreys.

"You must do as you please, of course,"

I replied; "but as I am here, it is scarcely necessary."

"I should prefer it," she answered.

I did not argue the point with her, and half an hour later took my place by my patient's bedside. Miss Norreys occupied an easy chair in a distant part of the room, and the old servant, Connor, sat within call in the dressing-room. The night passed without any special incident—the patient was restless and suffered much from thirst and want of breath. Towards morning he dropped off into an uneasy sleep—from this he awoke with a sudden sharp cry.

"Where am I?" he asked, in a husky whisper.

I bent over him instantly.

"In bed," I answered. "You have had a fall and have hurt yourself—I am sitting with you."

"I remember now," he said: "you are a doctor, are you not?"

"Yes—my name is Halifax—I am taking care of you for the present: Dr. Richards, your family doctor being away. Drink this, please, and lie still. You will soon, I trust, be much better."

I held a drink to the Squire's thirsty lips. He drained it off eagerly, then looked past me into the dark recesses of the room.

"Is that Orian in that chair?" he asked, a queer, startled quiver coming into his voice.

"No, father, it's me," replied Miss Norreys, alarm in her tone.

"I made a mistake," he answered. He closed his eyes, giving vent as he did so to a heavy sigh. A moment or two later he fell into a natural sleep.

In the morning I thought him better, and told Miss Norreys so.

"I am convinced," I said, "that the injury is only slight, and that the symptoms of



"'WHERE AM I?' HE ASKED."

paralysis will diminish instead of increasing. There is no present necessity for calling in a specialist, but I should like your father's family physician, Dr. Richards, to be telegraphed for. He knows his constitution and, in any case, ought to be here to take charge of his patient."

"I will telegraph for him," said Miss Norreys; "but I hope, Dr. Halifax," she continued after a pause, "that you will not resign the care of my father for the present."

"I will remain with your father, with pleasure," I replied; "but it is only just to Dr. Richards to consult him, and I should like him to be telegraphed for."

Miss Norreys promised to see to this immediately: the telegram was sent off, and a reply reached us within an hour or two. The family doctor was laid up with a severe chill in a distant part of the country, and could not return to Hartley for another day at least.

"That settles the matter, then," said Miss Norreys, with a sigh of relief. She was a wiry-looking woman, with a nervous expression of face. Her age might have been forty: her hair was thin, her brow deeply furrowed. It was easy to guess that trouble had visited this poor lady, and that even now she lived under its shadow.

The special nature of that trouble I was quickly to learn.

As the day advanced Squire Norreys grew distinctly better. His upper limbs were still completely paralyzed, but his breathing was less laboured, and the expression of anxiety and apprehension on his face less marked. When the evening arrived I was able to give a good report of my patient to his daughter.

"I have every hope that your father will completely recover," I said. "The effusion of blood into the cord, which is the symptom most to be dreaded in such an accident, is slight, and is being quickly absorbed. Of course, it will be necessary for a long time to keep the patient free from the slightest care or worry."

I paused here. Squire Norrey's face was not a placid one. There were fretful lines round the mouth, and many furrows surrounded the deeply set and piercing eyes. I remembered, too, the name he had spoken suddenly in the night, and the tone of consternation in which his daughter had assured him of his mistake.

"Undue excitement, worry, indiscretion of any sort, would be bad for him now," I said, "and might easily lead to dangerous symptoms."

Miss Norreys, who had been looking at me fixedly while I was speaking, turned very pale. She was silent for a moment, then she said, with passion:—

"It is so easy for doctors to order a sort of paradise for their patients—it is so difficult on this earth to secure it for them. How can I guarantee that my father will not be worried? Nay——" she stopped—a flood of crimson swept over her face—"I know he will be worried. Worry, care, sorrow, are the lot of all. If worry, care, and sorrow are to cause dangerous symptoms, then he is a doomed man."

"I am sorry to hear you speak so," I replied. "Your words seem to point to some special trouble—can nothing be done to remove it?"

"Nothing," she answered, shutting up her lips tightly. She moved away as she spoke, and I returned to my patient.

The following night Squire Norreys and I again spent together. He was restless and there was a certain amount of fever. Soon after midnight, however, he quieted down and sank into heavy slumber. About three in the morning, I was sitting, half dozing, by his bedside, when something made me start up wide awake. I saw that the Squire's eyes were open—a second glance showed me, however, that though the eyes were open, the man himself was still in the shadowy land of dreams—he looked past me without seeing me—his eyes smiled, his strong under-lip shook.

"Is that you, Orian?" he said. "Come and kiss me, child—ah, that's right. You have been a long time away—kiss me again—I have missed you—yes, a good bit—yes, yes——" He closed his eyes, continuing his dream with satisfaction reflected all over his face.

Who was Orian? It was not difficult to guess that, whoever she was, she had something to do with the Squire's too evident distress of mind. In the morning, as my custom was, I resolved to take the bull by the horns. I should be in a better position to help my patient if I knew exactly what ailed him—I determined to speak openly to Miss Norreys.

"Your father is going on well," I said, "but his improvement would be even more marked if his mind were at rest."

"What do you mean?" she stammered.

"You gave me a hint yesterday," I said—"you hinted at something being wrong. In the night the Squire had a dream—he spoke in his dream with great passion and feeling

to someone whom he called Orian—he seemed to find great relief in her presence. Is that your name?”

Miss Norreys was standing when I spoke to her—she now clutched hold of the back of the nearest chair to support herself.

“My name is Agnes,” she replied. “I knew, I guessed,” she continued — “I guessed, I hoped, that the old love was not dead. Did he speak to her, to Orian, as if he still loved her, Dr. Halifax?”

“Yes,” I replied. “Who is she?”

“I will tell you—come into my boudoir.”

She led me down a corridor and into a quaint little room furnished in old-fashioned style. Her movements were quick, her manner full of agitation. She hastily opened a davenport which stood against one of the walls, and took out a photograph in a velvet case.

“That is Orian’s picture,” she said, placing the photograph in my hand. “You will see for yourself that there is not much likeness between that young girl and me.”

I looked at the photograph with interest. It represented a tall, finely-made girl. Her face was dark, her eyes brilliant—the expression of her face was full of fire and spirit—her lips were beautifully curved, and were just touched with the dawn of a radiant smile. A glance was sufficient to show me that her beauty was of a remarkable and distinguished order.

“I will tell you Orian’s story in as few words as I possibly can,” said Miss Norreys. She sank down into a low chair as she spoke, and clasped her hands on her knees. I laid the photograph back on the table.

“We are step-sisters,” she began. “Orian’s mother died at her birth—she asked me to be a mother to her. I loved my step-mother, and the baby became like my own child. She grew up in this house as gay and bright and fresh as girl could be. From her earliest days, she was my father’s special darling and idol. It would have been impossible anywhere to meet a more winsome, daring, fascinating creature. The Squire is kind at heart—yes, I will always maintain that; but he has a somewhat fierce and overbearing manner—at times also his temper is irritable. Most people show a little fear of the Squire. Orian never feared anybody, and her father least of all. She would go about the place hanging on his arm. She would sit on his knee in the evening; she would ride with him all over the property—those two were scarcely ever apart, and a look, a glance from Orian would

soothe the old man in his most irritable moods. Her entrance into the room was like a ray of sunshine to my father.

“We all felt her influence,” continued Miss Norreys, with a heavy sigh; “her brightness made the old place gay; she was liked by young and old, rich and poor alike. Never was there a more warm-hearted, spirited, and brilliant girl. She could sing like a lark, and had also a considerable talent for art. My father would not allow her to go to school, but the best masters from Leamington used to come here to instruct her.

“Amongst them was a young man of the name of Seymour: he was an artist, and seemed to have talent above the average. He came here once a week to give Orian lessons, and he and she, in my company, used to go out to sketch. I liked him and was interested in his future; he expected to do great things with his art by-and-by. Orian and I were both interested in his day-dreams. Although poor, he was quite a gentleman, and was good-looking and refined in appearance.

“When my sister was nearly eighteen, my father came to me one day in order to make a confidence. There was no male heir to inherit the estates, but the property was not entailed, and the Squire could leave it to whom he pleased. He knew that I inherited a considerable fortune from my mother, also that I had no wish for matrimony. My father told me on this occasion that he wished Orian to marry well and young, and that he intended her eldest son to take the name of Norreys and be his heir. He further told me that he had fixed upon the man who was to be the child’s husband—a Sir Hugo Price, whose property adjoins ours. Sir Hugo had fallen in love with Orian, and a day or two before this conversation had asked my father’s permission to woo her and win her if he could.

“I was startled, and begged for longer time—my father, who never could brook the slightest opposition, became indignant, and firmly declared that the marriage should take place before the year was out. I thought Orian would settle matters by refusing to have anything to do with Sir Hugo Price, who was considerably her senior, and whom she never had shown the least partiality for. To my surprise, however, she made little or no opposition. She consented to be engaged to Sir Hugo, and the wedding was to take place immediately after her eighteenth birthday. The whole county was invited to Orian’s wedding—no prepara-

tions were too great to do honour to such a bridal.

"The night before, however, quite late, the bride stole into my room; she flung her arms round my neck, kissed me, and burst into violent weeping. I guessed at once that she was in trouble, but she would not confide in me. I could do nothing but soothe and pet



"I GUESSED AT ONCE SHE WAS IN TROUBLE."

her, and after a time she wiped away her tears, kissed me again, and went away.

"The next morning, you can imagine our consternation—the house was full of wedding guests, the bridegroom arrived in good time, but there was no bride for him to marry. My sister could not be found—she had left Hartley Castle, how and when no one seemed to know. I learned long afterwards that our old servant Connor was in the secret, but nothing would have induced her to breathe a word which might injure her darling. I can never tell you what that terrible day was like. The next morning a letter in Orian's handwriting arrived by post—it bore a London post-mark, and was addressed to my father. He read it standing by the hearth in this room. When he had finished it, he placed it in my hands, and said, abruptly:—

"‘She has made her bed and she shall lie on it. I forbid you to mention your sister's name again to me, Agnes.’

"He left the room as he spoke; when he had gone I read the poor child's brief words. She was now, she said, the wife of Charles Seymour, the young artist who had given her drawing lessons the previous summer, and to whom she had long been secretly and passionately attached. Nothing, she said, could bring her to marry Sir Hugo Price, but as she knew that her father would never consent to her engagement to Mr. Seymour, she was forced to take this cowardly way of securing her own happiness.

"‘Yes,’ she said, in conclusion, ‘I know what I have done is cowardly, and I fear it will be a long time before you forgive me; still, I do not repent.’

"There was no address on poor Orian's letter. I offered to return it to my father—he took it from my hands with a great oath, and, tearing it into shreds, flung the pieces on the fire.

"‘I forbid you to mention your sister's name to me,’ he said, ‘and, what is more, I lay my commands on you never to write to her or to have any further dealings with her of any sort whatsoever—if you do, you can also go.’

"Of course I could not leave my father—he wanted me during those fearful days of suffering more than he had any idea of.

"A year after the marriage the birth of Orian's son was announced in the *Times*. My father was the first to see the announcement. He pointed it out to me with a trembling finger. He had aged greatly during the year, and his temper, always irritable, was sometimes almost unbearable. He showed me the announcement of the child's birth now, and abruptly left the breakfast-table.

"That evening, however, to my great surprise, he came and spoke to me.

"‘I never go back on my word,’ he said. ‘Orian is exactly to me as if she were dead. She gave me up, and I give her up, but there is no reason why her son should not inherit the property.’

"My heart gave a leap at the words.

"‘What do you mean, father?’ I asked.

"‘What I say,’ he replied. ‘Orian has a son: he can take our name, he can be educated here—I can make him my heir, and he can inherit Hartley Castle after me—that is, if he is in all respects presentable—strong in limb and sound in intellect. Write to your sister, Agnes, and tell her to

and the child here for me to see when he is year old—write to-night, do you hear me?’

“I promised gladly—that evening my letter was posted. I begged of my poor sister to consider the splendid prospect for her child, and to think well before she refused the Squire’s offer. Her answer came back within a fortnight.

“‘I was glad to hear from you again,’ she said; ‘your letter satisfied some of my heart hunger, but not all. Only a letter from my father himself could do that. I have called the boy Cyril, after my father—he is in every respect a noble child. I should like him to inherit the old place. If my father will allow me to bring him myself to Hartley Castle, when he is a year old, and if at the same time he will forgive me for having married the man whom I really love, my baby Cyril shall be his heir—if not, my husband and I would prefer to keep our boy to ourselves.’

“I showed this letter to the Squire, whose face turned crimson as he read it.

“‘I never go back on my word,’ he said, ‘tell her that from me. If the boy is presentable I’ll have him, but I’ll have nothing to do with her, or the miserable pauper whom she has married.’

“I was obliged to write to Orian to tell her that there was no chance of a reconciliation for her or her husband. She never answered my letter. Months went by; the boy’s first birthday passed without my sister making any sign. Then, one day, I had a short letter from Orian. It ran as follows:—

“‘My husband is ill; I am in great anxiety. If my father still wishes to see little Cyril, I will send him to Hartley Castle when he is two years old.’

“I showed the letter to the Squire.

“‘Aye, tell her to send him,’ he responded.

“‘Won’t you give her a kind word, father? She is in dreadful trouble,’ I pleaded.

“‘I have nothing to do with her,’ he answered; ‘she is dead to me.’ He turned on his heel as he spoke, slamming the door after him.

“I wrote to my sister, telling her to send the child as soon as she could. My father never mentioned him again, but I saw by the expression in his eyes and by the eager way in which he watched when the post arrived each morning, that in reality he was always thinking of the child. One day I saw the announcement of Charles Seymour’s death in the *Times*. I rushed into my father’s study, holding the open paper in my hands.

“‘I know what you are going to tell me,’ he exclaimed when he saw me. ‘I looked

at the *Times* before breakfast—the fellow’s death is nothing to me.’

“‘But Orian,’ I interrupted.

“‘How often am I to tell you that she is dead to me?’ he replied.

“I turned away. As I was leaving the room he called after me.

“‘When do you expect that child to be sent here, Agnes?’

“‘He was to have come after his second birthday,’ I answered, ‘but it is scarcely likely that poor Orian will find herself able to part with him now.’

“My father stared at me when I said this; then, whistling to one of his dogs, he walked out of the room. On the child’s birthday a letter arrived from his mother. It contained a photograph of the boy and a few words.

“‘I am sending baby’s photograph,’ she wrote. ‘Perhaps my father will be able to judge by it whether the child is sufficiently presentable to inherit the property. At any rate, I cannot spare the boy himself for the present.’

“She made no allusion whatever to her husband’s death. I took the photograph and letter to my father. He read the letter through and then scanned the photograph eagerly.

“‘As far as I can see there is nothing amiss with the little chap,’ he said; ‘but you don’t suppose, Agnes, I am such a fool as to choose my heir from a photograph. Tell your sister to send the boy here with his nurse—I will defray the expense. After I have seen him, his mother can have him back again if she fancies it, until he is five or six years of age. If I adopt him as my heir, I will give a suitable allowance for his maintenance. You can mention that when you write.’

“I took the photograph and letter away with me, and wrote as I was bidden. A reply came within a week.

“‘I cannot fix any date for sending the child to Hartley Castle,’ wrote my sister. ‘As I said in my last letter, I do not wish to part with him at present. It is possible that I may send him in a few months for my father to see, but I do not make any definite promise.’

“That letter arrived about six months ago—the boy is now two and a half years of age, and we have not yet seen him. My father, I can see, lives in a constant state of fret and irritation. He often threatens to make his will, leaving the property to a distant relation, but for some unaccountable reason he never takes any active steps in the matter. You



"HE SCANNED THE PHOTOGRAPH EAGERLY."

speak of this anxiety being bad for him—what can I possibly do to remove it?"

"I should recommend you to see Mrs. Seymour," I replied, "and to find out for yourself what is her real objection to sending the boy here. I am firmly convinced that at bottom your father still retains a real and deep affection for her. I have known characters like his before. Such men will rather die than allow their indomitable pride to be conquered. The presence of the child might work wonders, and for every reason he ought to be sent for immediately."

Miss Norreys stood up in great anxiety and indecision.

"If I only dared to do it," I heard her murmur under her breath.

She had scarcely said these words when a rustling noise in the passage caused Miss Norreys to turn her head quickly—a look of eager and startled expectation suddenly filled her eyes. The next instant the room door was flung hastily open, and the disturbed face of the old servant, Connor, appeared—she rushed into the room, exclaiming, in an agitated way:—

"Oh, Miss Norreys, I hope you'll forgive me—I never, never thought she'd be so mad

and wilful. What is to be done, miss? Oh, suppose the Squire finds out!"

Before Miss Norreys had time to utter a word a tall, gracefully-made young woman, in deep widow's mourning, followed her into the room; behind the young widow came a nurse carrying a child. One glance told me who the widow and child were.

"Oh, Miss Orian, you shouldn't have come back like this," called out the old servant.

"Nonsense, Connor," she replied, in an imperious but sweet voice; "could I stay away, when you telegraphed that my father was so ill? Give me baby, nurse, and go away, please. Aggie, this is baby—this is little Cyril—I have brought him at last, and I have come myself. Connor telegraphed to me yesterday about my father's accident—she said his life was in danger. Aggie, kiss me. Oh, I have been so hungry for you, and for the old house, and for my dear father most of all. I

was too proud to come to him until yesterday—but now—now—yes he *shall* forgive me—I'll go on my knees to him—I'll—Oh, Aggie, don't look at me with such startled eyes—I have suffered—I do suffer horribly. Aggie, I am desolate—and—and—*here is baby*."

There was a wild sort of entreaty in her words and in the way she held the child out as she spoke. He was a heavy boy, but her young arms seemed made of iron. As to poor Miss Norreys, she was too stunned to reply. She stood with clasped hands gazing up pitifully at her sister.

"Take baby, Connor," said the younger woman. "Oh, Aggie, how old and worn you are. There, come to me, come into my arms." In a moment her strong young arms were swept round Miss Norreys' slight figure. She took the little lady into her embrace as though she were a child. Her long black widow's dress swept round her sister as she held her head on her breast.

Presently I went upstairs to sit with my patient. The improvement which I have already spoken of was more marked each time I saw him. The Squire's eyes were bright, and I saw by their expression that his mind was actively at work.



"SHE TOOK THE LITTLE LADY INTO HER EMBRACE."

"I fancied I heard carriage wheels," he said; "has anyone come?"

I was about to make a soothing reply, which should lead his thoughts from dangerous ground, when, to my extreme consternation and amazement, Miss Norreys entered the room, carrying her sister's little boy in her arms. I would have motioned her back if I could, but I was too late—the Squire had seen the boy—I saw him start violently—all the upper part of his body was still completely paralyzed, but the features of his face worked with agitation, and a wave of crimson mounted to his brow.

"Keep yourself calm," I said to him in a firm voice. "I cannot answer for the consequences if you allow yourself to get excited. Miss Norreys, you ought not to have brought that child into the room without my permission."

The poor lady gave me a piteous glance; her eyes were red and swollen with weeping.

"Let me see the youngster," exclaimed the Squire. "Bring him over to the bed, Agnes. I know who he is—he is Orian's boy—she has sent him here at last. Heavens! what a

look of the family the little chap has—he is a Norreys, not a doubt of that."

Miss Norreys stood with her back to the light.

"Bring him round to the other side of the bed," said the Squire, "and let me have a good look at him."

Miss Norreys obeyed with some unwillingness.

The full light now streamed on the child's face—it was beautiful enough to please anyone—the features were perfect, the contour aristocratic—the full eyes were lovely in colouring and shape; and yet—and yet it needed but one glance to tell me that no soul looked from the little fellow's tranquil gaze, that, in short, the mind in that poor little casket was a sealed book. The beautiful boy was looking at no one: he was gazing straight out of the window up at the sky. Presently the faintest of smiles trembled round his lips, but did not reach his serene eyes.

"He's a fine little chap," said the Squire, "but——" there was a fearful pause. "How old is he, Agnes?"

"Quite a baby, as you can see," said Miss Norreys.

"Folly," said the Squire; "he's over two—put him on the bed."

Miss Norreys obeyed.

The boy sat upright where he was placed, he never glanced at his grandfather, but his eyes followed the light.

"He's a fine little chap," repeated the old man; "very like us, but—when did you say he came, Agnes?"

"About half an hour ago," she replied, with firmness. "He's a lovely boy," she repeated; "he is as beautiful as an angel."

The Squire knit his brows—his face was getting flushed, his keen, sharp eyes looked from the crown of the child's head to his daintily clothed feet.

"Take him away," he said, suddenly. His voice was harsh, there was a tremble in it.

I motioned to Miss Norreys to obey. She lifted the little fellow into her arms again, and carried him out of the room.

The moment the door closed behind them, Squire Norreys turned to me.

"You are a doctor," he said, "and you know what's up."

I made no reply.

"That boy's an idiot," said the Squire—"he's a beautiful idiot—he's no heir for me—don't mention him again."

"There is something the matter with the child," I said; "what, I cannot exactly tell you without giving him an examination. As

he is in the house, I should like to go carefully into his case, and will let you know my true opinion as soon as possible."

"Aye, do," said the Squire; "but you know just as well as I do, Halifax, that the unfortunate child has got no mind—that accounts—that accounts——" he paused—the pink spots grew brighter on his cheeks.

"I must send for my man of business," he said, speaking with great excitement, "I cannot rest until I have made a suitable disposal of my property—the dream about that child inheriting it is at an end."

"Now listen to me," I said, in a firm voice; "unless you wish your heir, whoever he may be, to step into possession at once, you are to attend to no business at present. You have met with a serious accident—a very little more, and your life would have been the forfeit—as it is, you are making a splendid recovery, but excitement and worry will throw you back. In short, if you do not remain quiet, I cannot be answerable for the consequences. With care and prudence, you may live to manage your own property for many years. I am very sorry that you saw that little fellow to-day—the thing was done without my permission. I am going downstairs, however, to examine him thoroughly, and will give you my verdict on his case when next I see you. Now you are to take your medicine and go to sleep. Nurse, come into the room, please."

The professional nurse whom I had engaged to help me entered from the dressing-room. I gave her some directions, desired her to admit no one, and went downstairs.

Miss Norreys was anxiously waiting for me—she came out of her boudoir to meet me.

"Is my father worse?" she asked.

"I hope not," I replied; "but why did you bring that child into his room without my permission, Miss Norreys?"

"Oh, it was Orian," she replied; "she would not be reasonable—she seemed carried out of herself by excitement and distress. It was as much as I could do to keep her from bringing the boy to my father herself. Of course, I know *now* why she kept him away all these months; but she thought—she hoped—that my father might not notice how things were with the child while he was so ill himself."

"You both did very wrong," I answered. "Of course, Mr. Norreys could not fail to observe the child's strange condition. By the way, I should like to see the boy again."

"Orian is only too anxious to consult you

about him," replied Miss Norreys. "Will you come in here?"

She led me again into her boudoir, said, in a husky voice, "I have brought Dr. Halifax to see you, Orian," and closed the door behind us.

Mrs. Seymour was standing near one of the windows—the boy sat on a sofa facing the light. He was looking as usual up at the sky. The mother started when she heard my name, and gave me a quick glance.

"Come here," she said; "you can see him well from here. He won't mind—he never notices, never—he loves the light, he hates the dark—he has no other loves or hatreds. It's easy to satisfy him, isn't it?"

She glanced at me again as she said the last words, tears brimming over in her eyes.

"My sister tells me that you know something of my story, Dr. Halifax," she continued. "I have heard of your name, and I am glad to make your acquaintance. Agnes wishes me to consult you about the boy, but I do not think there is anything to consult about. Anyone can see what is wrong—he has no mind. He is just beautiful, and he is alive. Even the cleverest doctors cannot give baby a mind, can they?"

"I should like to ask you a few questions about him," I said in reply.

I sat down as I spoke and took the boy on my knee. He did not make the slightest objection to my handling him, but when I turned his face away for a moment from the bright light which streamed in from the window, a spasm of unrest seemed to pass over it. I felt the little head carefully; there was no doubt whatever that the child's intellect was terribly impaired: one arm and one foot also turned inwards—an invariable sign of idiocy.

While I examined the child the mother stood perfectly still. Her hands were locked tightly together; her attitude was almost as impassive as that of the baby himself.

She had expressed no hope a moment before, but when I looked up at her now, her "Well?" came in a hoarse and eager whisper.

"I can tell you exactly what is the matter," I said; "the state of the child's head makes the case abundantly clear. He is a very finely made child—see his shoulders, and the size of his limbs generally—observe, however, how small his head is in proportion to the rest of his frame. That smallness is at the root of the mischief. The little fellow is suffering from premature ossification of the cranial bones. In short, his brain is imprisoned behind those hard bones and cannot

grow. The bones I refer to should, at his tender age, be *open*, to allow proper expansion of the growing brain."

"He was born like that," said Mrs. Seymour. "The nurse told me so when he was a few days old. She said that most babies have a soft spot on the top of the head, but my boy had none."

"When he was quite an infant, did you notice anything peculiar about him?"

"He was very bright and intelligent until he was three or four months old."

"Yes," I continued: "and after that?"

"One day he was taken with a violent attack of screaming, which ended in a sort of fit—we sent for a doctor, who attributed the convulsions to teething, but after that the child's mind seemed to make no progress. He still knew me, however, and used to smile faintly when I approached him. This continued for some time, but of late he has ceased to notice anyone—in fact, as I said just now, the only pleasure he has is in turning to the light. Oh, his case is hopeless, and," she added, with passion, "he is all I have got."

Tears gathered in her eyes, but none fell—she turned her head away to hide her emotion. When she looked at me again her manner was quite quiet.

"My father has offered to make the little fellow his heir," she said; "but, of course, after to-day, he will put such an idea out of his head. I do not think I care very much now whether Cyril is his heir or not, but I should be glad, if in any way possible, to have a reconciliation with my father."

"I am afraid you must not see him to-day," I answered; "it would never do for him to know that you are in the house. He is going on well, so you need not be anxious about him, but you must have patience with regard to seeing him. As to the child," I continued, "most people would consider his case hopeless, but I am not at all sure that I do."

"What can you mean?" she exclaimed.



"WELL?"

"Cyril's case not hopeless! Surely I don't hear you aright—not hopeless! Speak, Dr. Halifax—your words excite me—speak, tell me what you mean."

"I will tell you after I have considered matters a little," I said. "An idea has occurred to me—it is a daring one; when you hear of the thought which has visited me, you may recoil from it in horror, but I cannot divulge it, even to you, until I have thought it over carefully. I will see you again on the subject in an hour or two."

A brilliant rose-colour had come into Mrs. Seymour's cheeks, her beautiful eyes grew full of light.

"You think that I won't consent," she said, "to *anything* that offers a gleam of hope! Oh, think out your plan as quickly as possible and let me know."

I said I would do so—my heart ached with profound pity for her. I went out of the house and

took a long walk. During the walk my idea took shape and form. The child's case was so hopeless that, surely, strong measures were justifiable which had even the most remote possibility of giving him relief. I felt inclined to do what had not to my knowledge been yet attempted, namely, to try to give release to the imprisoned brain.

When I entered the house the Squire was awake, and was asking to see me. I went up to him at once. He was no worse, and the eagerness which filled his eyes to learn my news with regard to the boy made me resolve to speak to him quite openly on the subject. I gave him a brief account of what I considered the state of the case—then I told him what I wished my line of treatment to be.

"I propose," I said, standing up as I spoke, for the thought of what I was about to do filled my mind with profound interest—"I propose to open the casket where the child's mind is now tightly bound up, and so to give the brain a chance of expansion."

"I don't understand you," said the Squire.

"It is difficult for me to explain to you

the exact nature of the operation which I hope his mother may permit me to perform," I continued. "I admit that it is an experiment, and a tremendous one; but I know a clever surgeon who can give me invaluable assistance, and, in short, I am prepared to undertake it."

"Suppose you don't succeed," said the Squire, "then the child——"

"The child may die under the operation," I said, "or he may live as he now is."

"And if successful?" continued Squire Norreys.

"Then he will be as other children."

The Squire was silent. After a long pause he said, "And you think the mother will consent to such a risk?"

"I can but ask her," I responded; "I am inclined to believe that she will consent."

"You are a queer fellow, Halifax; your enthusiasm excites even my admiration; but pray, why do you tell me all this?"

"Because I want you to abide the result of the operation."

"How long, supposing everything goes well, shall I have to wait?"

"Between three and six months."

"I may be in my grave before then."

"Not likely—you are already better. Nothing will be so good for you as hope. Live on hope for the next six months, and give your heir a chance."

"You're a queer man," repeated the Squire. He said nothing further, but I knew by his manner that he was prepared to abide by the issue of the operation.

I saw Mrs. Seymour soon afterwards, and explained to her as fully as I could the idea which had taken possession of me.

My few words of the morning had already given her hope. She listened to me now with an enthusiasm which gave me as much pain as pleasure—her longings, her passionate desires, had already swept fear out of sight—

she was eager, excited, restless, longing for me to try my skill upon the child. I told her that my idea was to divide certain portions of bone in the skull, so as to allow the closed-in brain to expand properly.

"It seems to me," I said, "the common-sense view of the matter to take some steps to give the cramped brain room for expansion. The child is healthy. With extreme care, and with all that surgical skill can devise, I cannot see why such an operation should not succeed. At the same time I must

not mince the matter; if it fails, there is danger, great danger, to life."

The boy was seated in a perfectly impassive attitude on his mother's knee. She squeezed him close to her when I said this, and gave me a quick glance from an eye of fire.

"The operation will not fail," she said.

"I believe it will succeed," I answered her. "In any case, I should advise it. The child's present case is so hopeless and deplorable that, in my opinion, very great risk is justifiable in any surgical interference which offers even a hope of cure."

"I consent," she exclaimed—she sprang up as she spoke, and still holding the boy to her breast, pulled one of his little arms round her neck—"I consent," she repeated. "If his father were alive, he would wish it. When can the operation be performed, Dr. Halifax?"

"As soon as possible," I answered. "Your father is now out of danger. Granted nothing unforeseen arises, he will completely recover from his accident—there is nothing to prevent my leaving him, more particularly as a telegram has arrived from Dr. Richards,



"YOU'RE A QUEER MAN,"
SAID THE SQUIRE."

who hopes to reach here this evening. I propose, therefore, that you and your boy return to London with me to-night. I can see Terrel, the surgeon whose assistance I wish to secure, to-morrow morning, and all arrangements for the operation can be quickly made."

"Very well," she replied, "I will be ready."

That night Mrs. Seymour, her nurse, and the boy accompanied me to London. We arrived there soon after midnight. Mrs. Seymour had rooms in Baker Street; and, when I saw her into a cab at Euston, I promised to call there at an early hour on the following morning.

I went to my own house to spend an almost sleepless night. Soon after eight o'clock on the following day I went off to see Terrel. He was one of the cleverest surgeons of my acquaintance, and I was anxious to talk the matter over with him in all its bearings. He was startled and amazed at what I proposed to do, but after much argument and consultation, admitted that my plan was feasible. The obvious common-sense view of opening the skull to give the imprisoned brain room for expansion appealed to him forcibly. He offered to give me all the help in his power, and we decided to perform the operation the following day.

I went straight from Terrel's house to Mrs. Seymour's lodgings, and told her of the arrangements we had made. She came to greet me with extended hands of welcome. The brightness of renewed hope still filled her eyes, but something in the expression of her face showed me that she had also passed a sleepless night.

Having described to her what preparations she ought to make, and further telling her that I would send in a good professional nurse to take charge of the case that evening, I went away.

The next morning Terrel and I, accompanied by the anæsthetist, arrived at the house. All was in readiness for the operation, and when we entered the bedroom where it was to take place, Mrs. Seymour appeared almost immediately, carrying the little boy in her arms.

"Kiss me," she said to him, eagerly—there was such passion in those words, that any spirit less firmly imprisoned must have responded to them. But light—light, was all that baby needed just then; as usual, his eyes turned to it. The mother pressed him to her heart, printed two kisses on his brow, and put him into my arms. Her look of eloquent pain and hope almost unmanned



"THE MOTHER PRESSED HIM TO HER HEART."

me. As she was leaving the room I had to turn my head aside.

Doctors, however, are a race of men who have little time to give way to mere sentiment. I soon turned with eagerness to the delicate task which lay before me. The baby was put immediately under an anæsthetic, and when he was unconscious I proceeded quickly with the operation. Briefly, what I did was somewhat as follows: Having laid back the coverings of the skull over those parts where I proposed to divide the bone, the long openings and the shorter transverses were successfully accomplished without injury to the delicate membranes underneath them, and I had the satisfaction of seeing the trenches which I had formed widening under my manipulation. Every detail of antiseptic dressing was carried out with scrupulous care, and the operation was finished without any untoward event. It took altogether an hour and a half. When I laid the little fellow back in his cot, and called the mother into the room, I felt sure that she knew by my face how hopeful I felt with regard to the result. She was white to the lips, however, and quite incapable of speech.

I left the house with the most extraordi-

narily mingled sensations of relief, triumph, and anxiety which I have ever experienced.

The suspense of the next few days can better be imagined than described. The gradual but sure dawning of hope, the fact that no bad symptoms appeared, the joy with which we noticed that the child rallied well! In three days my fears had nearly vanished. There was already an improvement in the child's intelligence—in a week's time this improvement was decisive. He no longer sat absolutely still—he began to take notice like other children—he ate and slept fairly well.

On the tenth day I dressed the wound, which was healing fast.

One month after the operation I heard the boy laugh—he turned his head away, too, when I entered the room, and hid his face shyly against his mother's breast. His behaviour, in short, was that of an ordinary infant of from six to eight months of age. Mrs. Seymour looked up at me on this occasion—my thoughts must have been plainly written on my face—for the first time during all these trying days she burst into tears.

"I cry because I am happy," she said, with a gasp in her voice. "He knows me, Dr. Halifax—baby knows his mother—you have seen for yourself how he has just distinguished between me and a comparative stranger."

"I congratulate you from my heart," I replied. "So far the success of the operation has been magnificent, but I should like to wait a little longer before I say anything to the Squire."

The months went by—the improvement in the child continued—the imprisoned brain developed with rapidity—the intellect seemed to expand with leaps and bounds. I saw the boy on his third birthday, and in every respect he was almost up to the average child of his age. I had made up my mind that the time had come to see Squire Norreys, when one day, a foggy one in late November, his card was put into my hand. I had just seen the last of my morning's patients, and was preparing to go out. I desired the servant to show the Squire into my consulting-room immediately. I could not help starting when he entered the room. He was a splendid-looking man of a type fast dying out. His olive complexion, his black eyes, and sweeping black moustache were in strong contrast to his abundant white hair, which was cut close to his head. There was no trace of weakness or illness about him now—he

walked into the room with a firm step, carrying his great height well. He gave me one of his keen glances and held out his hand.

"How do you do?" he said. "I happened to be in town, so I thought I'd call. I am, as you see, quite myself again."

"I am delighted to see that you are," I answered. "It needs but a glance to tell me that you have made a splendid recovery. Won't you sit down?"

"I am rather in a hurry," he replied. He took a seat nevertheless and looked at me. I saw the question in his eyes which his lips refused to ask.

"I am particularly glad to see you," I said. "The fact is, I was just about to write to you."

"It occurred to me that I might hear from you about now," he answered, in a would-be careless tone.

"Yes," I said, "I was going to propose to come to see you."

"Then," said the Squire, his voice getting a little rough, "you have news about—about my grandson?"

"Yes," I said; "I should like you to see him."

"Look here, Halifax," he exclaimed, eagerly, "is there any use in it? With all your cleverness, you know, you can't give a child like that a mind. I came here to-day because I gave you a sort of tacit promise that I would take no steps with regard to my property for a few months' time, but this kind of thing can't go on. I don't wish to lay up anxieties for a future death-bed: all must be settled now."

"All shall be settled now," I said. "Will you stay here, or will you come back again within an hour?"

"What do you mean? What folly is this?"

"Will you come back here within an hour and see your grandson? After seeing him you can then decide at once and for ever the question which worries you."

"You think him better, then?"

"I do."

"Remember, no half-witted person shall inherit Hartley Castle."

"The matter will lie in your own hands," I replied. "I should like you to see your grandson. I can bring him here within an hour; will you wait to see him?"

"All right," he replied.

My carriage was at the door—I jumped into it and drove straight to Baker Street. Mrs. Seymour was in. The boy was playing vigorously with a wooden cart and horse. He was using manly and emphatic action

with his wooden steed—he was, in fact, quite noisy and obstreperous. No trace of any wound disfigured his face—his wealth of beautiful curls was flung back from a white brow.

"Capital," I said, as I entered. "Now, Mrs. Seymour, I want to borrow this boy for an hour."

"Why?" she asked.

"His grandfather is waiting to see him at my house."

"Oh, then, I'm coming too," she said at once. "My father shan't have Cyril without me—I am resolved."

I stared at her for a moment—then I said: "Very well; get ready as fast as you can."

In three minutes' time we were driving back to Harley Street. The boy could not speak much yet, but he called his mother "Mummie," and constantly turned to look at her with eyes brim full of love. We entered the house, and I took the two straight into my consulting-room. The Squire started up when he saw them; a look which I can scarcely find words to describe filled his eyes—a sort of starved look, of sudden rapture; he scarcely glanced at the child, who walked as upright as a little soldier by his mother's side; all his gaze was given to her; he made an effort to frown and to be severe, but it was a poor pretence, after all.

"Cyril, this is your grandfather," said Mrs. Seymour. "Come and speak to him at once."

The Squire sank down again in his chair—he was almost weak from emotion—not a single word, good or bad, had yet passed his lips. Mrs. Seymour took the child and placed him on his grandfather's knee.

The little fellow turned and looked full up into the stern old face; the mother knelt on the floor at his side. The boy's brow

puckered—his lips pouted for a moment as if he would cry, then something bright attracted his eyes—he made a violent tug at his grandfather's chain, and pulled his watch out of his pocket. With a laugh he turned to his mother, and held the watch to her ear.

"Tick, tick, mummie," he said.

"'Pon my word, I'm blest," exclaimed the Squire.

When he said these words I left the room.



"'TICK, TICK, MUMMIE,' HE SAID."

It goes without saying that all went right after that. When last I heard of Squire Norreys, I was given to understand that he was much bullied by his grandson, who, in short, rules everyone at Hartley Castle. Mrs. Seymour, who, of course, is completely reconciled to her father, told me this in her last letter.