


# Stories from the Diary of a Doctor.

SECOND SERIES.

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.]

## VI.—LITTLE SIR NOEL.

F you please, sir," said my servant, Harris, "there's a young gentleman waiting to see you in your consulting-room."

I paused—I was coming home in a hurry to lunch.

"But this is not my hour for seeing patients," I said.

"He is a very young gentleman, sir; he came with a lot of luggage—here it is, all piled up in the hall."

I looked around my neat, well-appointed hall in astonishment. In one corner of it were a couple of large trunks. A strap with rugs, a hat-box, and other belongings of the traveller accompanied the boxes.

"Who in the world can have arrived?" I thought to myself.

I hurried off to my consulting-room as I spoke. I was not feeling too well pleased. I was in a great hurry, and had a specially hard afternoon's work before me. When I opened the door, however, my momentary irritation vanished. It was impossible for it to survive the expression of the little face which started suddenly into view when I appeared. A boy of about eight years old, in a brown velvet jockey suit, jumped up from his seat by one of the windows and came forward to meet me with one small hand outstretched.

"You are Dr. Halifax, are you not?" he asked.

"Right, my little fellow, and who are you?" I answered.

"I'm Noel Temple. Mother sent you this note: she said you'd look after me. I hope I sha'n't be very troublesome."

He sighed a little as he spoke, poised himself on one leg, and looked up into my face with the alert glance of an expectant robin.

"Noel Temple," I repeated—"Temple!—forgive me, I don't know the name."

"You used to know mother very well—she said so—she said you were playfellows long ago, and you used to quarrel—don't you remember?"

"What was your mother's name before she was married, Noel?" I inquired, suddenly.

"Forester—Emily Forester."

"Then, of course, I know all about her,"

Vol. ix.—83.

and you are most heartily welcome," I said, in a cordial tone. "Find yourself a seat while I read this letter."

I threw myself into a chair and opened my old playfellow's letter. It ran as follows:—

"MY DEAR DR. HALIFAX,—I hope you don't forget the Grange, where we once spent a long and happy summer when we were children? I am in a desperate difficulty, and have resolved to throw myself on your mercy. You can't have forgotten the name of your old playfellow, Emily Forester. I married when I was eighteen, and have been in India ever since. My husband, Sir Francis Temple, died six months ago. Noel is our only child. I have just seen a doctor about him—he says his heart is affected, and that there is irritability of the left lung. He has ordered him to leave India immediately; I have no time to explain why it is impossible for me to accompany him home. I am sending him, therefore, at the eleventh hour, in charge of the ship's captain, who, on landing, will put him into a cab and send him straight to you. For the sake of old times—be his guardian to a certain extent. Please take care of the child's health, and place him in a suitable family who will look after him and attend to his interests in every way. His solicitors are Messrs. Biggs and Flint, of Chancery Lane. They will supply you with all necessary funds. I am certain you will be good to the boy.

"Your sincere friend,

"EMILY TEMPLE."

When I raised my eyes after perusing this epistle, little Noel was standing in front of me; he was evidently making a minute study of my character. I looked up at him without speaking. He gave a sigh of relief.

"What's the matter?" I said then.

"You'll do," he replied. "I wasn't certain. I was dreadfully anxious, but I see it's all right." He held out his hand.

I clasped the little brown paw and, rising abruptly, said:—

"Come along, Noel. If you're as hungry as I am, you'll be glad of lunch."

"I should rather think I am hungry," said Noel. "I've had nothing to eat since eight o'clock this morning, when Captain



Reeves bought me two sponge cakes. Do you like sponge cakes, Dr. Halifax?"

"I can't say I do," I replied. "Now, here we are—place yourself opposite to me at that end of the table. Harris, lay a place immediately for Sir Noel Temple."

Harris left the room. Noel burst out laughing.

"It's so funny of you to call me Sir Noel," he said. "Don't you think it's rather stiff? Aren't you going to say Noel? We can't be really friends if you don't."

"All right," I replied, "you are Noel to me—but I must give you your title to the servants."

"I hate my title," said the child.

I saw that it would be impossible for me to keep him in my bachelor establishment; besides, London was no place for him.

The next two or three days passed without anything special occurring. I found it impossible to take Noel out with me, but I desired Harris to walk with him in the parks, and concluded that he was having a fairly good time. On the evening of the fourth day, however, I observed that the child's face was slightly paler than usual—that he ate little or nothing as he sat perched up opposite to me at late dinner, and that he sighed heavily once or twice.

The weather was autumnal, and the winter would soon be on us. I thought that



"I OBSERVED THAT THE CHILD'S FACE WAS PALER THAN USUAL."

"Why so? Some people think it very fortunate to have a handle to their names."

"You wouldn't think so if you had got it because you had lost your father," said Noel, fixing his big eyes steadily on my face.

His lips quivered—I saw that he could have cried if he hadn't been too brave to allow the tears to come.

"I quite understand what you mean, little man," I said. "Come, I can see we'll be capital friends. Now, here's a cutlet—fall to. If you're not in a hurry to eat, I am."

When lunch was over I took Noel back to my consulting-room, and made a careful examination of his lungs and heart. I saw that he was free from organic disease as yet, but was a fragile, delicate boy, and one who was likely to develop serious mischief at any moment.

Bournemouth would be a suitable place for the little fellow, and that evening before I went to bed I wrote a long letter to his mother telling her what I thought of the boy's health, and also saying that I was about to advertise for a suitable home for him.

My advertisement appeared in due course, and, as a necessary consequence, answers arrived in shoals. A friend of mine, a Mrs. Wilkinson, who only lived a few doors away, promised to attend to the matter for me. She would look over the answers, and reply to those she thought at all suitable. She did so, but nothing satisfactory seemed likely to be the result.

One evening, on returning home, Harris met me with the information that a lady had called, who wanted to see me on the subject of the advertisement.

"Where is she?" I asked.

"In your study, sir."



I went there at once, and found myself face to face with a tall, sweet-looking woman of between forty and fifty years of age. She wore a neat-fitting bonnet, a jacket of old-fashioned cut, and a pair of shabby gloves. She looked like what she was—a lady in poor circumstances. Her face wore an anxious and troubled expression. The moment I appeared she started up to meet me.



"SHE STARTED UP TO MEET ME."

"You are Dr. Halifax, are you not?" she said.

"That is my name," I replied.

"I am Mrs. Marsden. I saw your advertisement by chance this morning. I hurried up to town at once. I went to see Mrs. Wilkinson—she asked me to lose no time in having an interview with you. While talking to her, I made a remarkable discovery. Under the circumstances, it is strange that such an advertisement should have been inserted. I am unwilling to take offence, however. Poor Emily has always been peculiar. I wish to say now that I am desirous to have the boy. I will promise to take every care of him."

"Do you know Lady Temple?" I asked, in astonishment.

Mrs. Marsden smiled faintly.

"Lady Temple is my sister," she replied. "She is my sister, and I am married to her late husband's cousin. My husband, Mr. Marsden, is first cousin to the late Sir Francis Temple. The dear little boy is, therefore, a near relation on both sides."

"How is it that Lady Temple never thought of sending the boy to you?" I inquired.

"It is impossible for me to tell you. I am naturally the person who ought to have received the child on his arrival in England. My husband and I are not well off. We have a house at Bournemouth, and have long wished to have the care of a child in order to add to our income. Your advertisement attracted us both. I came up to town to answer it. You may imagine my surprise when I learned who the child really was, from Mrs. Wilkinson."

"It is strange that Lady Temple never mentioned your name," I replied.

"She must have forgotten it—this seems an unaccountable reason, but I can give no other. She is erratic, however—she has been erratic all her life. I am much older than my sister. I was married when she was a child. Still, of course, I love her, and would do all a mother could for her boy."

I thought for a moment—then I said: "The child has been absolutely committed to my care by his mother. He is very delicate, and is the heir to a large fortune."

When I said these words Mrs. Marsden turned very pale, then a brilliant colour flooded her face.

"I wish to say something," she remarked, after a pause. "What I am going to say may prejudice you against me. I am desirous to have the child for every reason—I am his near relation, and can naturally do more for him than a mere stranger. I also sorely need the money which his advent into our family will bring; nevertheless, I won't take charge of the boy, in case you are good enough to intrust him to me, without your knowing the simple truth. It is this—in the event of little Noel dying, my husband inherits the Temple property. In short, that delicate child is the only person who stands between my husband and considerable fortune."

"Thank you for telling me the truth," I replied.



"I hope this will not prejudice you against me, Dr. Halifax. The fact of my telling you what I have done ought to assure you of the honesty of my purpose."

"It would be impossible for me to doubt you," I said, glancing at her face.

"I am glad you say that." She clasped her thin hands together. She had removed her gloves during our interview. "I have had much trouble, and I am not a happy woman. I have suffered the sorest straits of poverty; the money which we will receive with the child will be of great value to us. My husband will be astonished when I tell him what the result of my inquiries has been."

"Well," I replied, hastily, "I can do nothing without consulting the mother. I am anxious to have the boy comfortably settled, and to get him out of town. I will send a cablegram to Lady Temple to-morrow, asking her to reply at once and to tell me what she wishes."

"Thank you. Are you likely to get her answer to-morrow?"

"I may do so in the evening. Are you staying in town, Mrs. Marsden?"

"I shall remain until you hear from my sister."

"Kindly write your address on that slate. I will let you know as soon as ever I receive Lady Temple's reply."

At the first possible moment in the morning I sent a cablegram to Lady Temple. It was worded as follows:—

*"Can't keep boy in London—his aunt, Mrs. Marsden, wishes to take charge of him. Shall he go to her? Wire reply."*

I received the following answer at a late hour that night.

*"Yes—arrange with Helen.—Emily Temple."*

This reply ought to have filled me with satisfaction, but it did not. I could not doubt Mrs. Marsden, but what about her husband? The boy was delicate—the man would gain immensely by his death. I resolved, notwithstanding Lady Temple's cablegram, to do nothing definite until I had seen Marsden. I wrote to ask Mrs. Marsden to call early in the morning. She came. The sweet expression of her face, and a certain honesty of eye, made me ashamed of my suspicion.

"Here is Lady Temple's reply," I said, putting the cablegram into her hand when she entered the room.

She glanced at it.

"Thank God!" she exclaimed. "You scarcely know what a relief this will be to us."

I broke in abruptly.

"I have something to say," I continued. "Notwithstanding Lady Temple's permission, I don't intend to part with little Noel without stringent inquiries. The mother is in India—the boy has been committed by letter to my care. Please don't suppose that I mistrust you personally, but the case is peculiar. I must have an interview with your husband. I will come down to Bournemouth on Saturday and will bring Noel with me. I may or may not take him back with me to town again. When I see you on Saturday we can discuss the matter further."

"Thank you—thank you," she replied. "I respect you all the more for being particular. At what hour may I expect you on Saturday?"

I glanced over a time-table.

"Noel and I will run down in the afternoon," I said. "Expect us between four and five o'clock."

She rose instantly—I bade her good-bye, and she left me.

I said nothing to Noel about the proposed change until the Saturday morning. Then I asked him if he would like to accompany me to the seaside.

His eyes danced with pleasure.

"I love the sea," he replied. "I mean to be a sailor when I'm a man."

"Well," I said, "you will chose a very good life. I intend to take you with me to Bournemouth to-day. Ask Harris to pack some things for you and be ready when I come home to lunch."

The child nodded his head brightly. I left him and went out to see my patients.

When I returned to the house I was met by Harris, who wore a very anxious expression of face.

"I am so glad you've come back, sir," he said. "Little Sir Noel has been ill."

"Ill," I cried; "where is he?"

"He is lying on a sofa in your consulting-room, sir; he particularly wished me to take him there. He says he would rather be in the consulting-room than any other part of the house. He seemed so ill that I thought you wouldn't mind."

"Quite right—I will go and see him," I replied.

I entered my consulting-room quickly. Little Noel was lying on a sofa. I had left him in the morning in apparently fair health. I was startled now with the change in his appearance. He could scarcely speak—his breath came quickly—there was a suspicious blue tint round the lower part of his face.

I brought my stethoscope and applied it





"HE COULD SCARCELY SPEAK."

to the heart. There was considerable anæmia, but I could trace no sign of absolute heart disease. The child, however, was very weak. I saw that he must not travel that day.

I telegraphed to Mrs. Marsden to tell her that Noel was ill, and that she could not expect us that day.

The child remained feverish and poorly during the greater part of that Saturday, but on Sunday he was nearly himself again. I saw with a pang that he was extremely delicate. There was not only heart weakness to contend against, but considerable irritability of the left lung. I began to consider whether he ought not to winter abroad—it was certainly necessary to send him out of London as quickly as possible. Nevertheless, as the hours went on, all my prejudices against placing him with the Marsdens increased rather than diminished.

I was just preparing to leave the house on that Sunday morning, and was standing on my door steps preparatory to entering my carriage, when a hansom drew up and stopped abruptly. A tall, good-looking man stepped out of it. He favoured me with a somewhat insolent stare, then ran up the steps and spoke abruptly.

"Am I addressing Dr. Halifax?"

"That is my name," I replied.

"And this is mine," he said, pulling a card out of his pocket.

I glanced at the name—"Mr. Paul Marsden."

"Indeed," I said, with some annoyance. "You have come up to town doubtless on receipt of my telegram?"

"Precisely—my wife has a cold, or she would have accompanied me. We were sorry to hear of the boy's illness. I want to speak to you about him. Can you give me a few moments of your time?"

"Yes—come this way, please."

I ushered Mr. Marsden into my consulting-room. Little Noel hadn't yet come downstairs. Marsden had a bold manner and a certain swagger about him. His eyes were dark—he wore a sweeping moustache—his head was closely

cropped. There was the unmistakable air of the bully in his manner. I saw at a glance that he meant to carry things with a high hand. I disliked the man intensely from the first.

"Now, look here, Dr. Halifax," he said, "I know everything—my wife has told me exactly what transpired between you and her. By the merest accident, she and I are both acquainted with the fact that her nephew and my cousin has been sent to England. My wife is willing to take care of the boy if the terms are satisfactory. She will give him a mother's care, and will devote herself to his health and to his training generally. She does this because I wish it, and because, to be quite honest with you, we both need the money. We should expect the boy's guardians to pay us a sum which could be discussed later on."

I interrupted.

"Money is not the consideration," I said. "I want a thoroughly comfortable home for the child, where his interests are certain to be made the first consideration."

"I understand you—that's your point of view. If we are well paid, it will be to our interest to keep the boy in health. I have never seen the child, and have naturally not a spark of affection for him. The late Sir Francis was my first cousin. Failing this child, the estates and title come to me. The boy's death, should it occur, would therefore be to my benefit. I state this fact quite



frankly. The fact of my having done so ought to assure you of the integrity of my purpose. I feel it, under the circumstances, to be absolutely to my credit not to leave a stone unturned to keep the child's fragile life in existence. I understand, however, the sort of feeling which makes you hesitate to commit him to my care. Your telegram of yesterday I regarded as humbug—I felt sure that the reluctance which my wife perceived in your manner would be likely to increase, not diminish, as time went on. I took the liberty, therefore, of sending a cablegram myself to

and I must see that your house is in all respects the most suitable for him to live in."

"You can do as you please with regard to that," said Marsden. "I have no doubt you will not like the house, but if money is no object we can soon move into one more suitable."

He rose as he spoke and walked towards the window, putting his hands into his trousers pockets as he did so. The more I looked at the man, the more cordially did I dislike him. Could I have invented the smallest excuse, I would have kept Noel

from his tender mercies at any risk. While I stood and thought, Marsden turned quickly and faced me. He pulled his watch out of his pocket.

"I am anxious to return to Bournemouth at once," he said. "If the child is well enough to travel, can you not bring him down to-day? I should like to have this matter settled as quickly as possible."

"I believe the child can travel to-day," I said. "Will you have the kindness to take a chair? I



"YOUR TELEGRAM I REGARDED AS HUMBUG."

Lady Temple. I have her reply in my pocket. Here it is."

As he spoke, Marsden unfolded a sheet of thin paper. He put it into my hands. I read the following words:—

"Ask Dr. Halifax to deliver Noel to your care and Helen's without delay.—Emily Temple."

"You see," continued Marsden, "that I have come with authority. I shall be glad to take my wife's nephew back to Bournemouth this afternoon, if he is fit to travel."

I didn't speak for a moment.

"In the face of that cablegram you can't detain the boy," continued Marsden.

"If his mother really wishes him to go to you, I have not another word to say," I replied, after a pause. "I regret, however, that she did not know her own mind when she first sent the child to England. It is still, however, my duty to care for his health,

will go and give directions about his clothes being packed."

Shortly afterwards we were on our way to Waterloo Station. We caught our train, and in due time found ourselves at Bournemouth. Noel was nearly quite silent all the way down. I observed him without appearing to do so. His sensitive eyes, with their distended pupils, a sure sign of delicacy, often travelled to the hard, flippant face of Marsden. Marsden whistled, joked, and was as vulgarly disagreeable as man could be.

We reached Bournemouth, a cab was secured, and we drove straight to the Marsdens' house. Mrs. Marsden came to the door to receive us. The moment I glanced at her, I was struck with the nervous expression of her face. She gave her husband a glance of almost terror, then with a forced smile turned to the boy, stretched out her arms, and



clasped him to her heart. Her manner to the child was full of tender affection.

"What fools women are," said Marsden, roughly. "To see my wife, anyone would suppose that she was the mother of that little brat. Come along in, Dr. Halifax. I hope Mrs. Marsden's manner satisfies you. You can see for yourself into what a snug corner your fledgling has dropped. Mrs. Marsden, when you've done hugging that boy, will you see about tea? Here, doctor, make yourself at home."

As he spoke he ushered me into a stuffy little parlour with a smell of stale tobacco about it. Mrs. Marsden followed us into the room—she held Noel's hand in hers.

"Can I see you alone for a few moments?" I said to her.

"Certainly," she answered.

She led me into a small drawing-room, shutting the door carefully behind her.

"I see," she said, the moment we were alone, "that my husband has had his way. He went up to town determined to have it."

"I will be frank with you, Mrs. Marsden," I replied. "Your husband would not have had his way but for Lady Temple's cablegram. In the face of that I could not detain the boy. Until I hear to the contrary, however, the care of his health is still in my hands, and while this is the case, it is my duty to arrange matters so that he may have a chance of recovery."

"Is his life in danger?" inquired Mrs. Marsden.

"It is in no danger at present."

"He looks sadly delicate."

"He is delicate. He suffers from weakness of the heart and a general delicacy, probably due to his early years being spent in a tropical climate. At the present moment, however, the boy has no actual disease. He simply requires the greatest care. Can you give it to him?"

"I think so."

"I believe you will do your best," I answered, gazing at her earnestly. "The child needs happiness—plenty of fresh air, and the most nourishing food. If his mind is satisfied and at rest, and if his body is kept from exposure, he will probably become quite strong in time. Are you prepared to undertake the care of the child, Mrs. Marsden? Remember that he will require the closest care and watching."

"He shall have the best that I can give him," she answered. "Before God, I promise to be true to the child—he shall want for nothing—I will be a mother to him."

"I believe you will be good to him," I said; "but please understand, I am not so certain about your husband. I don't suppose for a moment that he would do the boy a grave injury. If I seriously thought that, notwithstanding Lady Temple's cablegram, I would not leave him here; but without meaning to injure the child, he would probably be rough to him. In short, it is necessary that the little boy should be placed in your hands altogether."

"I will manage it, you needn't fear," she answered.

Pink spots burnt on each of her cheeks—her hands trembled.

"Very well," I said, "I am willing to trust you. I will see the child's solicitors to-morrow. Terms can be made which will abundantly satisfy your husband's expectations. I will leave Noel with you until I have had time to write to Lady Temple and to receive a reply from her. If the boy improves in health, the arrangement can be permanent. The first thing necessary to be done on your part, however, is to leave this house. Please see an agent to-morrow, and select a house in a dry and sunny part of the pine wood."

"I will do so," replied Mrs. Marsden, "and now I think tea is ready. Will you come into the dining-room with me?"

I accompanied Mrs. Marsden into the shabby room where Marsden had first led me—the close smell again affected me disagreeably.

"May I ask you to open that window at the top?" I said to Marsden; "my patient must not be exposed to draughts, but it is necessary that he should have a certain amount of fresh air."

"What do you mean?" said my host, with a scowl.

"What I say, sir," I replied. "The boy must not have his meals in such a close room as this."

Marsden went up to one of the windows, opened it about an inch, and then took his seat at the table. Mrs. Marsden sat opposite the tea equipage; she had helped Noel to a cup of tea, and was just handing one to me, when the room door was opened and a cadaverous-looking young man of about one or two and twenty entered.

"Oh, is that you, Sharp?" said Marsden. "Dr. Halifax, let me introduce my young friend, Joseph Sharp. Sharp, you have the privilege of making the acquaintance of a Harley Street doctor, of some reputation. Take a good look at him, my boy; if you are



prudent and clever, you may follow in his footsteps some day. Sharp is studying medicine," continued Marsden, by way of explanation to me—"he looks like one of the fraternity, doesn't he? Sharp has just the right hand for an operator—so I always say. He prefers medicine, but I tell him he's lost to surgery."

While Marsden was speaking, Sharp wiped the perspiration from his face—his appearance was by no means prepossessing. He sat down near me, and once or twice raised his eyes to glance inquisitively at Noel. Noel was studying him with the frank stare of a child.

"Are you preparing yourself for the medical profession here?" I asked, after a pause.

"Yes," he replied, "I am filling in my vacation by studying materia medica and dispensing at Dr. Biggs's—I work there all day."

"And sleep here," interrupted Marsden. "Sharp is a good fellow, Dr. Halifax. I often say he has the making of a fortune in him if he only knows how to apply himself. By the way, in case that boy is ill, I suppose you will like Biggs to see him?—we can't telegraph for you whenever he has a cold in his head or anything of that sort."

"I will arrange that," I answered. "My friend, Dr. Hart, will look after the child—I am going to see him before I return to town. I am afraid I must now say 'Good-bye.'"

I rose as I spoke; at the same moment little Noel sprang to his feet and ran to my side.

"I want to go back to town with you," he said; "I don't wish to stay here."

"Come, my little man, no folly of that sort," said Marsden, roughly. He stepped

forward and laid his hand on the child's shoulder.

"Leave him to me," I said. "Come, Noel, I will speak to you in the drawing-room."

I took the child's hand and led him out of the room.

"You must be a brave boy," I said, steeling my heart against his tearful face. "Your mother wishes you to stay here for a little, and your aunt has promised to be very kind to you. I'll come and see you this day fortnight. Now, you know, you are not going to cry—manly boys don't cry."

"No, I won't cry," said Noel. He made a valiant effort to swallow a lump in his throat. "I'll stay if you wish me to," he added, "but you'll promise faithfully to be back in a fortnight?"

"You have my promise," I replied.

"Thank you," said Noel; "I trust you—you are a perfect gentleman—gentlemen can always be trusted."

He put his hand into mine and we returned to the parlour. I was shaking hands with Mrs. Marsden, when I was attracted by an unusual sound. I looked around me, thinking that a bird had come into the room. To my

astonishment, I noticed that Sharp was imitating the dulcet strains of the nightingale with wonderful accuracy. After producing some exquisite notes, he stopped abruptly, and beckoned Noel to his side.

"Are you fond of music?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Noel.

"Would you like to whistle like that?"

"Yes—oh, yes."

"Let me look at your throat—if you have the right sort of throat, I can teach you to imitate any bird that ever sang."

The boy opened his mouth eagerly—his



"GENTLEMEN CAN ALWAYS BE TRUSTED."



sorrows were completely forgotten—he didn't even notice when I left the room.

At the end of ten days, I had a letter from Mrs. Marsden. She had not only found a house, but had moved into it—Noel was well and happy, and was looking forward with interest to my visit.

I kept my word, and the following Sunday arrived again at Bournemouth. Mrs. Marsden had given me the new address, and I soon found the house. She received me in the hall.

I scarcely knew her for the same woman who had interviewed me a fortnight ago. Her face was bright—the anxiety had left her manner. She was neatly and properly dressed, and looked like what she was, the mistress of a charming and well-appointed house.

"You will like to see Noel," she said; "he is in the garden with Joe, as we always call Mr. Sharp. He is devoted to Joe, and will never stay with anyone else when he is in the house. Oh, there they both are. How delighted Noel will be to see you again."

Mrs. Marsden opened the French windows of the pretty drawing-room as she spoke, and called the boy's name.

"Here is Dr. Halifax, Noel," she cried.

"Hallo! I'm coming," answered little Noel, in his clear tones; "you must come, too, Joe—yes, I insist." Then he called out again, "Tell Dr. Halifax that I'll be with him in a minute with Joe, Aunt Helen; now then Joe, come on."

The two approached the window together. They made a strong contrast. The boy looked lovely and blooming—there was colour in his cheeks, animation and hope in his eyes. Sharp's cadaverous face, his undersized, undeveloped person, his large mouth and small eyes with their red lids, gave him altogether a repulsive *tout ensemble*. Nevertheless, the child adored him. By what possible means had he won the boy's heart? Even when Noel sprang to my side, he glanced back at Sharp.

"I'm so glad to see you, Dr. Halifax," he

said. "Oh, I'm as well as I can possibly be—you ask Joe about me. Joe is clever; he's teaching me all sorts of things—I've got some carpenter's tools, and I'm making a ship. Joe knows the names of all the different sails. Then he's teaching me to imitate the birds—he says my throat is the right sort. I can do the robin and the thrush and the blackbird now, and next week I shall have a try for the lark's notes. You stay quiet, Dr. Halifax, and listen. Now, what bird am I imitating?"

He stepped back, screwed up his little mouth, and whistled some beautiful notes.

I made a correct guess.

"That's the sweetest thrush's song I've heard all the year," I said.

He clapped his hands with delight.

At dinner I observed that Marsden's place was empty. I inquired for him.

When I did so, Mrs. Marsden's cheeks became suffused with pink.

"I meant to tell you," she answered. "My husband has left us for a time."

"Left you?" I asked. "Where has he gone to?"

"To America—sudden business has called him to South America—he will in all probability be absent for the winter."

I guessed now why Mrs. Marsden's manner had so altered for the better. Marsden was away—she could do exactly as she pleased, therefore, about the boy. The boy was of course perfectly safe with her, and I might, therefore, cast all anxiety with regard to him from my mind.

Shortly afterwards I took my leave.

There was no necessity for me to see little Noel again for some time, and when I received a sudden

telegram about him, he had to a certain extent passed into the back part of my memory.

The telegram was from my friend, Dr. Hart, in whose medical care I had placed the boy. It contained the following words: "Sir Noel Temple ill—heart attack—wish to consult you."

I wired back to say that I would go to



"THEY MADE A STRONG CONTRAST."



Bournemouth by the evening train. I did so, and reached Dr. Hart's house about ten o'clock.

"I'm heartily glad that you are able to come, Halifax," he said, as he led me into his smoking-room. "I have just come from the child—I don't like his condition."

"When I heard about him last, he was in perfect health," I replied.

"That is the case—he remained well until last Monday—I was suddenly sent for then, and found him in a state almost approaching syncope. I gave him the usual medicines and he quickly revived. Since then, however, his condition has been the reverse of satisfactory, and he was so weak to-day, and the medicine had so completely failed to produce the expected results, that I thought it best for you to see him."

"I am glad you sent for me," I replied. "The child has from time to time suffered from functional derangement of the heart. He had a nasty attack just before he was taken to Bournemouth, but on examination I could not trace the slightest organic disease."

"I have also examined the heart carefully," replied Hart, "and cannot trace any cardiac disorder. The state of the little patient, however, puzzles me considerably—there is nothing to account for the complete depression of the whole system."

"Well," I replied, "I will go with you at once to see the child."

It was nearly eleven o'clock when we arrived at the Marsdens' house. Mrs. Marsden was up; she was evidently expecting us. When we rang the hall-door bell, she opened the door herself.

"Come in," she said. "Oh, Dr. Halifax, I'm so glad you are here. I think Noel is a shade better. The boy has spoken about you several times to-day—he has repeatedly said that he wanted to see you. He suffers greatly from restlessness and low spirits—that is, when Joe is not in the room with him. He is more attached to Joe than ever, but of course he can't be with him during the day, as Dr. Biggs requires all his time. Joe is with the child now—he sleeps in his room—they are quite cheerful together—I even heard Noel laugh as I came downstairs."

Mrs. Marsden's face looked much worn, and her eyes were red as if she had been crying. No one could doubt the genuineness of her trouble about the child. She hurried us into one of the sitting-rooms, and said she would go upstairs to prepare little Noel for our visit.

A moment or two later, Hart and I went upstairs to visit the little patient. The room in which he was lying was large and lofty. He was half sitting up in bed supported by pillows—his breath was coming quickly—there was a bright spot on one cheek, but the rest of the face wore a suspiciously blue tint.

I spoke to him cheerfully; he gave me one of his usual bright, affectionate glances, and put his hand into mine.

"Stoop down," he said, in a whisper.

I bent over him immediately.

"It takes my breath away to talk, but I'm awfully glad you've come," he said, with emphasis.

"I'm delighted to see you again, dear boy," I replied. "Now the thing is to get you better as quickly as possible. I will just listen to that troublesome little heart of yours, and see if I can't do something to set it right again."

"It's like a watch gone wrong," said Noel. "I wish it would tick properly."

"So it shall, by-and-by," I answered.

I took out my stethoscope and made the usual examination. The action of the heart was feeble—the pulse intermittent; but I quickly came to the conclusion that the disorder was functional. There was no organic mischief to be detected in any of the sounds.

"What are you giving him?" I said to Dr. Hart.

Sharp, who had been standing by the head of the boy's bed, now came hastily forward.

"Perhaps you want to see the prescription?" he said, stammering as he spoke. "I am very sorry—I left it at the chemist's. I took it there in a great hurry this evening, and brought away the medicine without waiting for it. Shall I run and fetch it?"

"No," replied Hart, "that is not necessary—I can tell you exactly what I prescribed, Halifax—digitalis, bromide of potassium, and a little of the alcoholic extract of aconite."

"I will talk the matter over with you downstairs," I said.

We left the room together.

After some consultation, I suggested the addition of ether to the medicine. I then proceeded to say:—

"The condition of the heart is not alarming in itself—there is no murmur, but there seems to be a slight dilatation of the left ventricle. You did quite right to order the extract of aconite—there is, in my opinion, no more useful medicine for such a condition. The boy will require rest and great



care. The probabilities are that, with this, he will return to his normal condition within a few days. I should like, however, to have a trained nurse sent for immediately."

"I agree with you," said Hart. "I don't care for that fellow Sharp."

"The child seems attached to him," I replied; "but in any case he can't be with him all the time. The boy will do much better with a nurse. I happen to have a nurse belonging to my own staff who will be just the person to undertake the case. I will telegraph to her to come here the first thing in the morning."

I saw Mrs. Marsden, and spoke on the subject of the nurse.

"I shall be delighted to have a proper nurse," she replied. "I thought of engaging one before you came, but the child clings so to Joseph Sharp, that I didn't dare to propose that anyone else should take his place."

"He must have a nurse," I answered; "he can see Sharp now and then in her presence. The mere fact of his taking so much interest in the man's society is too much for him in his weak state."

I asked Mrs. Marsden if she could give me a bed, and spent the night in the house with my little patient. Towards morning I rose and went into his room. Sharp was lying on a stretcher bed in another part of the room. He didn't hear me when I came in. He was lying on his back with his mouth open. I thought his face repulsive, and wondered why the boy took to him as he did. I felt my little patient's pulse without awakening him. It was soft and regular; there was a faint moisture on the skin. He had already taken two doses of the altered medicine. I was satisfied with the result of the new ingredient which I had introduced. I was about to leave the room when Joe's voice, sharp and sudden, smote on my ears.

"You might make it five thousand pounds, Mr. Marsden," he said.

He turned over on his side as he uttered the words, and fell off into profound slumber. I was too busy and preoccupied to give the queer sentence a second thought, but I was destined to remember it later on. I went off now to telegraph for Nurse Jenkins, a nurse I knew and could depend on. She arrived in the course of the morning, and I established her by little Noel's bedside be-

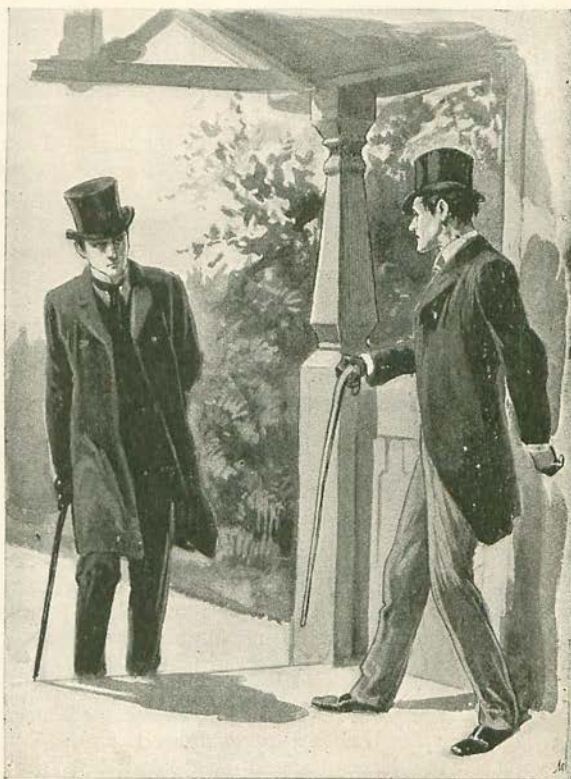
fore I returned to town. Hart and I had a further consultation about the boy. The nurse promised to write to me daily, and I went back to London under the conviction that the child would speedily recover from his present attack.

I received a bulletin every evening from the nurse. On the third day, her letter ran as follows:—

"I don't like my little patient's symptoms. I give him his medicine regularly, but I often feel inclined to leave it off altogether. Almost immediately after taking it, he complains of a feeling of sickness—he has even vomited once or twice. The vomiting is followed by a state of collapse more or less severe; the pulse is very intermittent. Dr. Hart is ill, and has not seen the child for a couple of days; his assistant promised to write to you about the medicine."

I expected a letter by the next post, but none came. I felt uneasy, and resolved to go to Bournemouth.

I arrived late in the afternoon and went straight to the Marsdens' house. Just as I reached the door, it was suddenly opened and Sharp came out. He evidently didn't expect me, for he started violently and his



"HE STARTED VIOLENTLY."



ugly white face assumed a green tint—his small eyes almost started from his head.

"Oh, the boy is just the same," he said. "He's weak—I don't believe he'll do—glad you've come—didn't know you were expected."

"I have come," I replied, briefly, "in consequence of a letter from Nurse Jenkins. I am sorry the boy is not so well."

"He doesn't gain strength," said Sharp. "Are you going up to see him now?"

"Yes," I replied—I passed him as I spoke.

I ran quickly upstairs. No one knew I was in the house. I opened the door of the sick room. Mrs. Marsden was sitting by the little fellow's bed. He was lying flat on his back, his head was raised, he was breathing faintly, his eyes were shut. The nurse was arranging some bottles and medicine glasses in a distant part of the room. She turned on hearing my footsteps, put one finger to her lips, then beckoned to me to follow her into the ante-room.

"Oh, Dr. Halifax," she said, "I'm so relieved you've come. The child is, I fear, sinking fast."

"I hope not," I answered.

"But he is—he grows worse each moment. I am dissatisfied about the medicine. Dr. Hart is very ill—his assistant knows nothing about the case. It is a great relief to see you here."

"You ought to have telegraphed for me," I said. "Now don't keep me—I will ascertain the child's condition myself."

I returned to the sick room and took the boy's little wrist between my finger and thumb. The pulse was scarcely perceptible.

"He has been very sick again," said Nurse Jenkins; "he is sick every time he takes the medicine. I had almost decided not to give him another dose when you arrived."

"Bring me some brandy at once," I said.

The nurse did so. Mrs. Marsden, who had started to her feet when I approached the bedside, gazed at me with eyes dilated with terror.

"Keep quiet," I said to her; "the boy is too weak to stand the slightest noise—he will be better when he takes this."

I mixed a strong dose, and put a little between the child's lips. After some difficulty he swallowed it—his beautiful eyes were glazed—he looked at me without recognition.

"That's right," I said, when I became certain that he had really swallowed the brandy; "the heart's action will soon be better."

As I spoke I took out my hypodermic syringe and injected a little ether under the skin. The effect was instantaneous—the child's breathing became easier, and a little colour came into his ears.

During the next half-hour I administered small doses of brandy at short intervals, and tried every means in my power to induce heat. After a time success attended my efforts—the boy sighed—moved a little, and opened his eyes wide—the state of collapse had passed. His cheeks now burned with fever, and the pulse galloped hard and fast in his little wrist.

I motioned to Mrs. Marsden to take my place by the bedside, and then asked Nurse Jenkins to accompany me into the next room.

"Show me the prescription," I said.

"I am very sorry," she replied; "I have just given it to Mr. Sharp."

It suddenly flashed through my memory that on the last occasion when I wanted to see Hart's prescription, I could not do so because Sharp had left it at the chemist's. The nurse went on apologizing.

"We were out of the medicine—I wanted to have some more made up. Mrs. Marsden's own chemist lives some way from here, and Mr. Sharp suggested that if I gave him the prescription he would get it made up by a chemist close by."

"How long is it since Sharp was here?" I asked.

"Just before you came—he rushed into the room making quite a noise. The child was very weak at the time. He came close up to the bed, and looked at the little fellow for two or three minutes. To tell the truth, Dr. Halifax, I never liked the man, but he must have been much attached to the boy. I seldom saw such a look of agony on any face. I can really describe his expression by no other word."

"Are you quite sure, nurse, that Sharp has not been alone with little Noel since you had the charge of him?"

"Quite; I have actually lived in the room. Mr. Sharp has been to see Noel once or twice every day. The little fellow delighted in his visits. Mr. Sharp used to imitate the birds—little Noel generally fell asleep while he was whistling."

I thought hard for a moment.

"What is the name of the chemist who usually makes up the medicine?" I asked.

"Howell and Jones—their shop is close to the sea at the bottom of the hill. Howell and Jones are the chemists Mrs. Marsden



used to employ when she lived in their old house. She thought that Noel's medicine might as well be made up at her own chemist's."

"Have you any of the medicine left?" I asked.

"No, the last dose is finished—the bottle was forgotten to be sent to the chemist's this morning—that is why Mr. Sharp rushed off with the prescription in a hurry. The hour is past now when the child ought to have his medicine."

"I should like to see the empty bottle."

Nurse Jenkins went to look for it. She came back in a few moments.

"I left it on the wash-hand stand in that room," she said. "It is not there—I wonder if Mr. Sharp put it in his pocket?"

"It doesn't matter whether he did or not," I replied.

My suspicions were fully aroused. There was more than anger in my heart at that moment.

"Do not say a word of what I suspect, nurse," I said, "but my impression is that there is foul play somewhere. The medicine which Dr. Hart and I prescribed could by no possibility have the effects which you describe. I am going immediately to see Howell and Jones. Give the boy a dose of brandy if there is the

least return of faintness, and don't allow Sharp near the room on any terms."

I left the house, hailed the first cab I saw, and drove to the chemist's shop. I entered quickly; a tall, serious-looking man was standing behind the counter. I asked him if he was a member of the firm.

"I am Mr. Howell," he replied.

I took out my card and gave it to him.

"You have been making up medicines for a patient of mine," I said, "a little boy of the name of Sir Noel Temple. He is living with one of your customers, Mrs. Marsden. You have made up medicine for the child several times."

"I have, Dr. Halifax."

"I want to look at your copy of the last prescription."

The man turned to fetch his book.

"May I ask, doctor," he said, as he handed it to me, "if the child is better?"

"No; he is suffering from serious collapse and weakness."

"That seems scarcely to be wondered at," remarked the man. "There is a special in-

gredient in your prescription which surprised me—niconitin seems quite a new drug to order in cases of heart failure."

"Niconitin?"

I exclaimed, horror in my tones. "What can you possibly mean? There was no niconitin in the prescription. Such a drug would act as direct poison in a case like the child's."

"Nevertheless, it is one of the principal ingredients in the prescrip-

tion, doctor. Look at my copy—here—you see, the proportion is large—I have made up this medicine three or four times."

As the man spoke he turned his book towards me and laid his finger on the copy of Hart's prescription and mine. With a glance my eye took in the names of the different ingredients. The chemist was right—a large proportion of niconitin was one of them. This drug, as is well known, is the active property of tobacco. Its effect upon the heart would account for all the



"LOOK AT MY COPY."



symptoms from which the child was suffering. Taken in quantities here prescribed, it would cause vomiting, collapse, and feeble action of the pulse. In short, its effect on the irritable heart of my little patient would be that of direct poison.

"Do you mean to tell me," I said, in anger, "that you, an experienced chemist, would dispense a prescription so manifestly contradictory without referring to the doctor who wrote it?"

"I spoke to Mr. Sharp about it," replied the man. "I even pointed out the inconsistency. He replied that the case was peculiar, and that niconitin was necessary as a sedative. Had it not been for Mr. Sharp, whom we know so well——"

"That will do," I interrupted, "I have no more time to waste over words. I shall probably want to see this book again. Meanwhile, give me a piece of paper, I must order another medicine."

I hastily wrote out a prescription for a strong restorative. The medicine was supplied to me, and I went back as fast as possible to the Marsdens' house.

Mrs. Marsden came downstairs to meet me.

"How is the child?" I said to her.

"Better; he is in a natural sleep."

I took the bottle of fresh medicine out of my pocket.

"Give this to nurse," I said. "The child is to have a teaspoonful every quarter of an hour. By the way, at what hour does your boarder, Mr. Sharp, come home?"

"Not until evening, as a rule, but it so happens that he is in the house at the present moment."

"Where?"

"In his bedroom—he ran upstairs ten minutes ago. He asked first if you were in. Do you want to see him?"

"Yes, I do. Which is his room?"

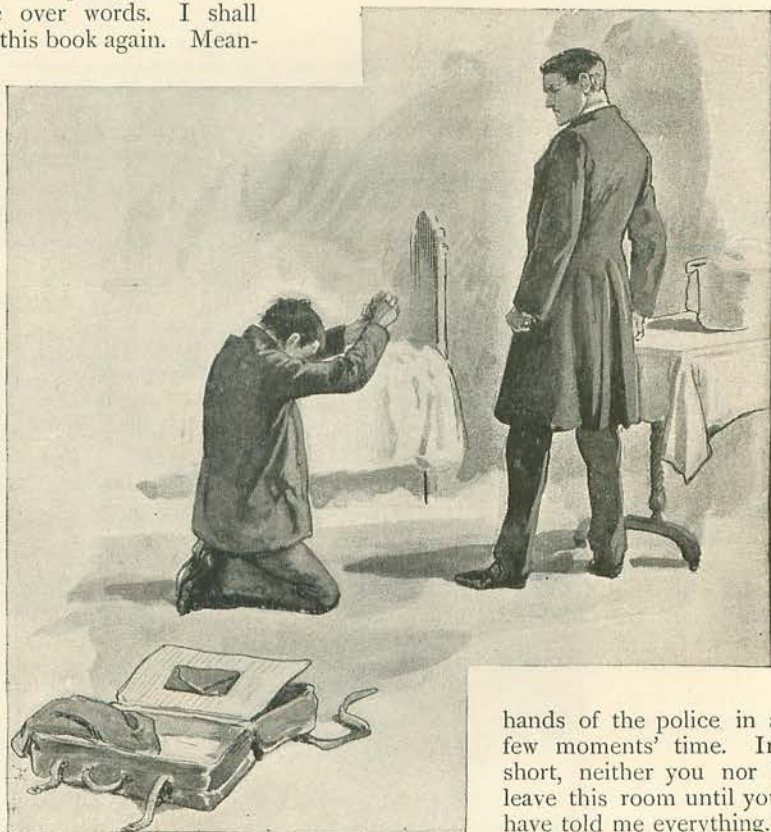
"I will send for him."

"No; tell me which is his room, and I will go to him."

My manner surprised her. She gave me a brief direction. I rushed upstairs and entered Sharp's room without knocking.

The fellow was standing by a small port-manteau which he was hastily packing. When he heard my step he turned—his face became ashy pale—he looked almost as if he would faint.

"Now, look here," I said, closing the door and walking straight up to the man, "I have discovered the whole of this villainous plot. If you don't confess everything immediately, you will find yourself in the



"THE FELLOW WENT ON HIS KNEES IN HIS TERROR."

hands of the police in a few moments' time. In short, neither you nor I leave this room until you have told me everything."

The fellow went on his knees in his terror—he covered his face with his shaking hands.

"Get up," I said, in disgust. "I can't speak to you nor listen to you in your present position."

He rose and tottered towards a chair—he was really too weak to stand.

"I'm glad you know," he said, with a sort



of gasp; "yes, I am—I'm glad it's all known. I couldn't have gone on with it—I'd rather be hanged than go on with it for another hour."

"Tell me your story quickly," I said; "I have not a moment to listen to your sentimentalities—the child's life hangs at this moment in the balance."

"Is there a chance for him, doctor?" said the man, looking full up at me.

"Yes, yes, if you'll only be quick and pull yourself together."

"Then I will—my God, I will—I don't care about anything now in the world except the little fellow's life. Half an hour ago I stood by his death-bed. My God, it was torture to stand there and look at my own work!"

"Speak," I said; "if you don't tell me what you know at once, I will send for the police."

Sharp gave me another terrified look. I saw by the expression in his eyes that, whatever his sins, he at least repented now.

"It was this way," he began: "I was Marsden's tool. I don't want to blame him over much, but I was his tool from the first. He wanted the boy to die, and he wanted to get off himself scot-free. As soon as ever he heard who the child was, he began to plot this fiendish thing. He dragged me into it—I struggled against him, but he was strong, and I had no power. He knew one or two things against me, and he held them over my head. I agreed to help him. I wasn't a week with the boy before I began to get fond of him."

"You can leave that part out," I interrupted, with heat.

Sharp paused as if someone had dealt him a blow.

"Marsden went to America," he continued. "He promised to give me £4,500 on the day he entered into possession of the child's estates. I was always studying drugs, and he suggested that I should give the boy something to bring on an attack of the heart, and then that I should tamper with the doctor's prescription. I had been studying the effects of tobacco taken in excess, and it occurred to me that niconitin would do the deadly work. That's all. The boy has been taking large doses of niconitin disguised in your medicine for the last fortnight."

"Where's Marsden now?" I said, when the fellow paused.

"I can't quite tell you—somewhere in America—for God's sake, don't give me up to him—he'd murder me."

"Your future is nothing to me," I said. "but I shall take the precaution to lock you

up in this room until I know if your little victim is to live or die. If he lives, you can go; if not——" I did not finish my sentence, but, turning the key in the door, ran quickly downstairs. Mrs. Marsden was waiting for me in one of the passages.

"What is the matter? Why were you so long with Mr. Sharp?" she said.

"Come in here—I have something to tell you," I answered.

I opened a door which stood near—we entered a sitting-room—I closed the door behind me.

"I can't conceal the truth from you, Mrs. Marsden," I said. "I have made an awful discovery—that poor little fellow has been the victim of a fiendish plot."

She interrupted me with a cry.

"No, no," she began, "no, don't say it—no, it's impossible—he's far away—he is bad, but not so bad as that."

"I pity you from my heart," I answered, "but your husband is bad enough for anything—he left his tool behind him—Sharp was his tool. I am only just in time to save the boy."

I then briefly told Mrs. Marsden of the discovery which I had made at the chemist's.

Her horror and agitation were excessive; she, at least, poor woman, was fully innocent.

"I must take the boy away from here," I said. "I am sorry—I know you have had nothing to do with it, but because you are that scoundrel's wife—I must take the child away from you as soon as ever he is fit to be moved."

"I submit," she answered. "The fact is, I would not have him now on any terms. Oh, what a miserable woman I am—why did I ever listen to my husband? Why did I ever consent to receive the child? Oh, he is a fiend—he is a fiend—why have I the misfortune to be his wife?"

I had no reply to make to this—it was time for me to hurry back to my little patient's bedside. He was very ill. For the next few days his life really hung in the balance. The case was such a peculiar one that I resolved not to leave him. Nurse Jenkins and I watched by him day and night. After two days, the extreme weakness became less marked, and gradually and slowly the heart recovered tone and strength. After a very slow convalescence, little Sir Noel became much better. I brought him back to Harley Street—he is still with me. I mean to keep him until his mother returns to England. As to Sharp, I gave him his liberty when I saw that the boy was likely to live. I have not heard of him since.