

Stories from the Diary of a Doctor.

SECOND SERIES.

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

XII.—“TO EVERY ONE HIS OWN FEAR.”

[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.]



AMONGST his friends Charlie Fane's name was always spoken of as a synonym of good luck. I happened to meet this gay and *débonnaire* youth during a short visit which I paid to my friends, the Cullingham's, at their beautiful place in Warwickshire. The time of year was towards Christmas, and there was a merry house party at "The Chase." The old house rang with mirth and festivity from morning till night. The spirit of the time seemed to get into the rooms, and to infect us all to a more or less degree. Even the elderly amongst us yielded to the all-prevailing spirit of frolic, and forgot for a time, in the most pleasurable manner in the world, the graver side of life. There were several young men in the house, but Fane was the life of the party. His spirits ran the highest, his wit was the most appreciated, his songs were invariably encored, and his society sought for, not only amongst the girls, but also the men of the party. All alike petted and fêted him—in short, his presence was looked upon as sunshine, and his praise was on everyone's lips.

Cullingham, my host, was a grave, middle-aged man on the shady side of fifty. Mrs. Cullingham was a charming hostess, possessing, I think, only one failing, and that was an incessant and almost tiresome habit of praising the hero of the hour—Charlie Fane. It is irksome to hear even the best person

always vaunted to the skies, but I must say that Charlie took the good things which were said about him without the least approach to conceit or self-consciousness. Fortune had always smiled upon him, and he believed it would do so to the end. He was in high favour when I arrived at "The Chase," but before my brief visit terminated, he was more than ever the cynosure of all eyes. Amongst the guests was a very beautiful girl, of the name of Alice Lefroy. Charlie's susceptible heart was immediately smitten with her charms; he followed her about like a shadow, and it was more than evident to all present that Miss Lefroy was not unwilling to receive attentions from him. The happy youth made love in the most open and undisguised style, having little doubt

that, according to his invariable good luck, he would obtain without much difficulty the object of his desire.

On the evening before I left "The Chase" to return to my London duties, I spent an hour or two with Cullingham in his smoking-room.

"By the way," I said, as I rose to say good-night, "you will let me know how affairs progress between Fane and Miss Lefroy. I am interested in them—in short, they look like a couple who have come straight from

Eden, and have never had anything to do with the bad ways of this troublesome world."

Cullingham laughed in a rather strained manner when I spoke. He was silent for a moment, looking thoughtful.



MISS LEFROY.

"It isn't my affair, of course," he said, after a long pause; "but, nevertheless, I am not thoroughly happy about this business. Fane is one of the most attractive fellows I have ever come across."

"If he is attractive to Miss Lefroy that is all right," I replied. "She evidently likes him—I do not think either of the young folks have taken much trouble to disguise their feelings."

"That is just it," said my host, "that is just what bothers me; Fane is in love with Alice, and I greatly fear that Alice is in love with him. Now it happens that she is engaged to another man."

"Impossible!" I said.

"It is only too true," said Cullingham; "she has been engaged for the last couple of years to a man considerably her senior, of the name of Pennington. Philip Pennington is sincerely attached to her, and until now I considered the engagement a very happy one. When first she came, I regarded the little flirtation between her and Fane as nothing more than a joke, but now I begin to doubt whether I did wisely in not telling him of her engagement."

"I know Miss Lefroy very slightly," I said; "but the little I have seen of her makes me doubt whether it would be possible for so sweet and frank a girl to act with duplicity—she has doubtless mentioned her engagement to Fane. Well, I am sorry. I did hope that couple would have made a match of it—they seemed so pre-eminently suited to each other."

"So they are, Halifax," said Cullingham. "I feel as sorry as you do at the present moment about the affair. I sincerely hope it is not serious, and will say something to Fane to-morrow."

Soon afterwards I bade my host "good-night," and retired to my own room.

The hour was late, but I was not at all inclined for slumber. I sat down, therefore, by my cheerful fire, and taking up a book tried to engross myself in its contents. To my surprise—for I am a voracious reader—I found I could not do so. Between me and the open page appeared, with tiresome reiteration, the face and figure of Fane—the clear eyes; the straight, well-cut features; the broad, athletic figure; the muscular hands; the splendid physique of the man. By his side I saw also the ethereal and exquisitely proportioned face and form of the fair young girl whom, after all, he might never hope to win.

"There comes a day when the luckiest man finds his luck forsake him—it is the

course of life," I could not help muttering to myself. As this reflection came to me, I started suddenly to my feet: a sharp and somewhat imperative knock had come to my bedroom door.

I went quickly across the room and opened the door. Fane stood without.

"I hope you won't find me an awful nuisance," he said, "but I saw a light under your door—can you spare me five minutes of your time?"

It is my luck to find myself appealed to in an emergency. This young man had never made a special friend of me up to this moment. One glance at his face, however, was sufficient to show that he meant to confide in me now. I was glad of it, for I had taken a great liking for him.

"Wait a moment," I said, "until I get into my coat; there is a fire still in the smoking-room—we can go down there."

"Yes, we can have the smoking-room to ourselves," said Fane, "for every other soul in the house is in bed."

"Go down, then, and wait for me," I said. "I will join you in a moment."

I did so. When I entered the smoking-room, Fane was standing with his back to the fire, which he had built up into a glowing and compact mass—he had also turned on the electric light, and the room looked cheerful.

"Now, what can I do for you?" I said, dropping into a chair and looking up at him.

"Confound it!" he muttered. He gnawed his moustache almost savagely, and looked down at me without adding to this exclamation. I waited for him to go on.

"It is awfully hard lines to worry you," he said; "but Alice and I—"

"Alice?" I interrupted.

"Oh, Miss Lefroy I mean—hang it all, you may as well know the truth—Miss Lefroy and I are engaged. Hear me out, please."

I was preparing to interrupt him, but sank back now in my chair and allowed him to finish his story.

"We are engaged," he said—his tone had a certain defiance in it—"it came about to-night, unexpectedly; I am coming to particulars in a moment or two. We are in trouble, I daresay you guess; but our engagement is hard and binding, thank Heaven! Alice thought we had best confide in you—it is a shame, of course, for you are not even a special friend—but she shrank from Cullingham or Mrs. Cullingham knowing anything about it, and you are a doctor, and a good fellow, people say; may I go on?"

"You certainly may," I answered.

"Ah, thanks. You see, Alice guessed all right about you—I won't tell you all she said, it would make you conceited—but, there, I wish you could have seen her face when she said, 'Thank God, Dr. Halifax is in the house.'"

"Well, tell me your story now, my dear fellow," I interrupted.

"Alice is engaged to me—that is the main thing—that is the rock to which I cling."

"But how can that be?" I said. "It is scarcely an hour ago since Cullingham informed me that Miss Lefroy was engaged to a man of the name of Philip Pennington."

"Pennington is in the house," said Charlie, clenching his hand. "He arrived at Ashworth by the last train, and drove over in a fly—it was that hurried matters on. Alice wants to break with him, doctor—she never loved him—why, he is twenty years her senior. I vow before Heaven I won't give her up—now, what is to be done?"

"It is an ugly business," I said. "I don't know that I ought to help you—you had no right to steal Pennington's promised bride from him."

"You mustn't blame Alice," he began, eagerly. "She told me of her engagement the first day I saw her, and showed me her ring; we played at love at first, and never knew that it was going to be reality until we found ourselves deep in the fire. Alice and I often sat and talked by the hour of Pennington; we saw no danger, and knew of none until to-night when she heard his voice in the hall—she and I were together in the conservatory. She turned like a sheet, and I, well, I broke down then; I had her in my arms in a minute, and, of

course, after that, it was all up; but, hang it, Pennington thinks she is still engaged to *him*, and what is to be done? The thing must be broken off—it is a horrid business for her and for me, and for Pennington too, poor beggar! Now I think of it, I can almost pity him for having lost her."

"You want my advice?" I said, abruptly.

"Well, yes—that is, Alice thought—the fact is, we must consult someone, and you are in the house."

"I will tell you what I should do if I were you," I said.

"Yes?"

Fane remained standing—his good-humoured, happy face looked quite haggard—there were heavy lines round his mouth—he was as white as death.

"I should be man enough," I said, looking him full in the face as I spoke, "to leave this house by the first train in the morning in order to give Miss Lefroy a fair chance of reconsidering the position."

Fane opened his lips to interrupt me, but I went on, doggedly.

"That is the right thing to do," I said; "go away at once. Give Miss Lefroy three months—you took her by surprise—let her know her own mind when you are not present to influence her. The fact is this, Fane, you must endeavour to look at things from Pennington's point of view—you must put yourself, in short, in his place. How would you feel if, during your absence, another man tried to alienate the affections of the girl you were engaged to? Remember, the fact of the engagement was never concealed from you."

"I know—I am a scoundrel," said Fane.

He turned his back abruptly, leant his elbow on the



"SHE HEARD HIS VOICE IN THE HALL."

mantel-piece, and covered his face with his hands.

"You have done what many another hot-headed young fellow has done before you," I continued. "Up to the present your conduct has been excusable, but the test of your manhood will depend upon how you act now."

"I know," he said, turning fiercely round and looking at me; "but I can't do it, sir—before Heaven, I can't!"

"Then I have nothing more to say," I remarked, rising as I spoke. "I am sorry for you and sorry for Pennington. Good-night."

I held out my hand as I spoke; he grasped it silently—his eyes would not meet mine. I left him and went back to my room.

I had to return to town by the first train in the morning, and did not think it likely that I should see Fane again. Cullingham saw me off. He informed me briefly that Philip Pennington had arrived unexpectedly by the last train the night before. I had scarcely any remark to make to this, for I could not betray young Fane's confidence, but I begged of Cullingham to let me know the issue of events.

"There'll be the mischief to pay," he said, gloomily. "At the present moment neither Alice Lefroy nor Fane know of Pennington's arrival; of course, the fat will be in the fire now. Well, I will write to you, Halifax, when I have anything to say."

A moment later I was bowling away in the dog-cart which was to convey me to the station. My train left Ashworth at eight o'clock, and I had just ensconced myself comfortably in the corner of a first-class compartment, when a porter hastily opened the door and admitted a young lady. She threw up her veil the moment she saw me, and taking the seat opposite mine, bent forward impulsively.

"I thought you would be going to town by this train, and hoped I might have your company to London," she said. "You don't mind, do you?"

"I am surprised to see you, Miss Lefroy," I answered.

"But you are not angry with me, Dr. Halifax?" she said. "Charlie told me of your interview with him last night. Under the circumstances, I could not meet Mr. Pennington, so I thought it best to go—Charlie will see him after breakfast and tell him everything."

She panted slightly as she spoke; she was a very fragile, beautiful girl. At the first glance one would suppose that she scarcely

possessed the physique which would stand much shock; but as I observed her more closely I came to the conclusion that she was possessed of a considerable amount of tenacity of purpose, and might, on occasion, be obstinate, in a cause which she took to heart. It was not my place to find fault with her; I therefore saw that she had a foot-warmer, helped her to unfasten her rug from its strap, and, when the train was in motion, asked her how she contrived to get away without Cullingham's knowledge.

"Oh, I sneaked off," she said, with a little laugh; "my maid helped me. I left a note for Mrs. Cullingham, and we drove away by the back avenue. We saw your trap ahead of us most of the way. My maid is in a second-class compartment next to this. If you really wish it, I can join her at the next station."

"By no means," I answered; "I shall be glad to have your company up to town."

I unfolded a newspaper as I spoke, and for a short time engrossed myself in its contents. Looking up presently, I observed that Miss Lefroy was gazing fixedly out of the window, and that her pretty soft eyes were full of tears.

"Well," I said, laying down my paper, "I suppose you want to tell me your story?"

"Oh, no; I don't wish to say much," she answered, in a steady, grave voice—"there is not much to tell. My mind is absolutely made up. I shall marry Mr. Fane—if I do not marry him I will never marry anybody. It is quite true that for the last couple of years I have been engaged to Philip Pennington, but I never loved him. I am an orphan, and have no money, and Philip is rich—enormously rich; and my aunt, Mrs. Leslie—she lives in London—I am going to her now—urged and urged the marriage—so I consented to be engaged, but I did not love him. That fact did not matter, perhaps, until the moment came when I learned to love another man. You must know for yourself that under existing circumstances it would be a sin for me to marry Philip Pennington."

"That is the case," I replied, after a pause. "I am sincerely sorry for you. May I ask what you intend to do when you get to town?"

"I shall tell Aunt Fanny the truth, and will then immediately write to Philip—but he will have heard the story before then."

"Do you mind telling me what sort of a man he is?"

She looked distressed. "People think a

good deal of him," she said, after a pause; "but I—I have never really trusted him. Oh, it seems a dreadful thing to say of the man you expected at one time to marry, but he looks to me—sinister—there, don't ask me any more—it is wrong of me to have said even what I did."

She turned her head aside again, and drawing down her veil sank back in her seat. At the next station some other passengers got into the compartment, and I had not an opportunity of making any further inquiries. At Paddington I saw Miss Lefroy into a cab, and as I said "Good-bye," told her that if at any time I could be of service to her she had but to command me. I then returned to Harley Street to attend to my many and pressing duties.

A week passed before I heard anything of Fane or Miss Lefroy; then one morning a letter arrived from Cullingham—it was satisfactory, as far as it went.

"You will be anxious to hear full particulars with regard to what I am pleased to call Fane's entanglement," said Cullingham, after he had prefaced his letter with remarks of general interest. "By the way, I believe that little goose Alice travelled up to London in the same train with you. Imagine her sneaking off in that fashion! However, now to particulars. I think I gave you to understand that I always had a high respect for Pennington, which I am sure you will share when I tell you how well he has behaved in this matter. On the morning you left, Fane had an interview with me. He spoke in a very manly way, poor lad, and told me everything. I saw that the case was a serious one, and that neither of the pair was really much to blame. Fane begged of me to break the news to Pennington, who was already, I could see, very much annoyed by Alice's unexpected departure. I had a bad quarter of an hour when I told my old friend how matters really stood. The tidings were scarcely pleasant ones, but there was no help for it—I could not mince matters. Pennington's *fiancée* had given her heart to another man. That being the case, I assured him that his own engagement could not possibly go on. I confess that he looked ugly for a time, and refused to see Fane at all. But he

recovered himself in the most surprising manner, and told me on the following morning that he withdrew from his position as Miss Lefroy's lover, and would do what he could for the young couple. This was more than could have been expected of him, and I told him what I thought of his generosity. He went up to town that day and saw Alice; her aunt, Mrs. Leslie, wrote to say no one could have behaved better than Pennington. She said she felt very angry with Alice, who shrank from the poor fellow with ill-concealed dislike. He took no notice of this, but spoke to her in the most affectionate way.

"I see, child," he said, "that I cannot be your husband; but, as I am sincerely attached to you"—here his voice quite shook—"I am willing and anxious now to act the part of a father. I will do all in my power for you and Fane, and you must both arrange to pay me, as soon as possible, a long visit at Birstdale Abbey, my place in Roxburgh."

"This arrangement was made on the spot, although Miss Lefroy began by objecting to it very strongly. Pennington and Mrs. Leslie, however, over-ruled all objections. Pennington is to have a large house party in



"I TOLD MY OLD FRIEND HOW MATTERS STOOD."

February, and Mrs. Leslie, Alice, and Fane are to be amongst the most favoured guests. Fane is poor, and Alice has no fortune, so the young couple must not think of matrimony for some little time. "Yours truly,

"JOHN CULLINGHAM."

I had scarcely read this letter before my servant threw open the door to admit a visitor. I was sitting in my breakfast-room at the time; I raised my eyes to see who my guest was, and then rose up with a smile to see and congratulate Charlie Fane.

"I wonder if you have heard the news?" he said.

"I am just reading about it," I said, pointing to Cullingham's letter as I spoke. "Sit down, won't you? May I give you some breakfast?"

"No, thanks; I have had some at my club. Well, I am the luckiest fellow in the world."

"You have my best wishes," I answered. "You had a generous foe, Fane; few men, under the circumstances, would have acted as Pennington has done."

"So everyone says," replied Fane.

He sank down on a seat and, resting his elbow on his knee, pressed his hand to his cheek—his eyes sought the floor. He had just won the girl of his choice, but he scarcely looked like a rapturous or happy lover at that moment.

"What's up now?" I could not help muttering to myself.

The thought had scarcely rushed through my brain before Fane fixed his eyes on my face.

"You are surprised to find me in the blues," he said. "Of course it goes without saying that I am the luckiest dog in Christendom. I am madly in love with Alice, and she with me, bless her. As to our engagement being a long one, we both of us are prepared to face that. Pennington has been good—well, to tell the truth, I wish he had been worse—it is horrible to take favours from a fellow whom you have just robbed of his dearest possession. The fact is, doctor, Alice and I hate beyond words the idea of going to Birstdale Abbey.

"Pennington's kindness in the matter is almost overpowering; he has not only taken Alice completely under his wing, by regarding her now, as he says, in the light of a dearly loved daughter, but he has done the

same for me. He talks to me by the hour about my prospects, and assures me that he will not leave a stone unturned to further my interests. Nevertheless, ungrateful as it is of me to say the thing, I can't abide him. The thought of going to stay at his place is most repugnant to me—Alice shares my antipathy to the whole arrangement."

"I can quite understand your feelings," I replied; "were I in your place I should be similarly affected; but may I ask why you go?"

"I cannot get out of it—nor can Alice. Pennington wrung a promise from her when he went to release her from her engagement to him. At such a moment she was not in a position to refuse him anything in reason that he asked. Mrs. Leslie, Alice's aunt, is most anxious that we should keep on friendly terms with Pennington. She is to accompany us to the Abbey—we go on Monday. I assure you, sir, I by no means look forward with pleasure to the visit."

"Well, after all, it is a trifle," I said, rising as I spoke, "and as you yourself admit, you owe a great deal to Mr. Pennington for behaving so well."

"I should think I do. The fact is, I'm a brute for not worshipping him; but he has done far more than I have told you. I am a good linguist, and he believes that he can give me substantial help in that direction.

Pennington's brother is in the Embassy, and Pennington is trying to get me a post as his secretary. Of course, that would mean foreign service, and parting from Alice for a time, but would eventually lead to our marriage. Yes, the man has behaved like a brick; nevertheless, I loathe the idea of staying at his place."

"I am afraid you must grin and bear it," I said.

"Yes, of course."

Here Fane paused—he raised his eyes and looked full at me. "It is a sin to waste your time with this sort of grumble," he said.



"HE SCARCELY LOOKED LIKE A HAPPY LOVER."

"You don't suppose I have come here this morning just to whine about such a small matter. The fact is, I want to consult you on something else. Will you please regard my visit as professional?"

"You are surely not in bad health?" I asked, looking in astonishment at the splendid, athletic-looking youth.

"Not really, but I sometimes fancy that I have something wrong with my heart. When a man contemplates marriage he ought to be certain that he is sound in every point. Will you examine my heart, doctor?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

I rose as I spoke, fetched my stethoscope, and soon had the satisfaction of telling Fane that he must not give way to nervous fancies, for his heart was perfectly sound in every particular. I thought my words would reassure him, but his face still looked pale, his eyes were full of gloom, and the haggard lines which I had noticed about his jovial, good-humoured face when he first told me of his engagement to Miss Lefroy again manifested themselves.

"I cannot get over it," he said. "I must confide in you. Do you know that once, as a boy, I was supposed to be dead?"

"You had an attack of catalepsy?" I asked.

"You would perhaps call it by that name—anyhow, it was a sort of trance. May I tell you the story?"

"Take a seat, Fane. I am much interested in this subject, and would be glad to listen to any information you can give me."

"You believe that death can sometimes be assumed?"

"I know it for a fact," I answered.

"I am glad to hear you say so—I have asked that question of more than one doctor, and in almost every case have received a smile of derision."

"These assumed deaths are not so common as some nervous people imagine," I continued, "but I firmly believe that there are cases on record where persons have been buried alive. This would be more likely to occur in foreign countries, where interment, as a rule, takes place on the day of the death. There is only one remedy for such a state of things—but that, perhaps, is too professional to interest you."

"Not at all—I am morbidly interested in this subject, as you will know when I tell you my own experience."

"The law, as it at present stands, is not sufficiently strict with regard to the death certificate," I said. "No doctor ought to

give a certificate of death, under any circumstances whatever, without having viewed the body. As the law now stands, if for any reason it is inconvenient for the doctor to be present after death, he has only to put in the words: 'As I am informed.' Apart from any danger of burial alive, which is, of course, very slight, the present arrangement leaves a loophole for crime. The law should be altered on this point without delay."

"I am heartily glad that those are your views," answered Fane. "I only wish that every doctor in the land could hear you. Now then, I will tell you my own story. My mother died when I was eighteen—she died suddenly of failure of the heart. I was her only son—we were passionately attached to each other. I left her quite well on a certain morning, and came back after a day's fishing to find her no more. The news came on me as a sudden and awful blow. I succumbed to it immediately and became very ill. I don't remember how I felt, nor exactly from what I suffered, but I lay in bed, refusing food, and with a dull weight of indifference which possessed me more and more strongly day after day. My nurse and attendants were, I feel convinced, under the impression that I was quite unconscious, but the strange and terrible thing is, that this was never the case. I heard the faintest whisper which was breathed in the room in which I lay—I understood with almost preternatural clearness everything that went on. I knew when the doctor visited me, and when the nurse moved about by my bedside, and when my mother's old servant bent over me and sobbed. There came a day when I heard the doctor say:—

"The case is hopeless—he is dying—nothing more can be done for him. There is no use worrying him with medicines. He will pass away quietly within the next hour or two. Let me know when he dies; I will send you down a certificate."

"The doctor was an old man—he had attended my mother for years. After pronouncing my death-warrant, I heard him leave the room. I lay motionless on my back with my eyes tightly shut—the weight which pressed me down grew heavier and heavier. The nurse lingered for a time in the room. I knew she bent over me—I felt her breath on my cheek—there was a slight warmth and an impression of added light, and I think she was moving a candle before my eyes. I think also that she placed a glass over my lips to see if there were any breath; after a time she left me. I was alone. I felt



"THE CASE IS HOPELESS—HE IS DYING."

myself incapable of moving an eyelid—I was bound tightly as if in solid iron. After a long time—it seemed almost like eternity to me—I heard the door open again, and a brisk young step came over the threshold.

"'You say he died half an hour ago, Mrs. Manning?'" said a voice, which I recognised as belonging to another doctor of the same firm.

"'Yes, sir, about half an hour ago,' was the reply.

"A stab of horror went through my heart. I made a frantic effort to move, but could not stir. The invisible irons bound me down more tightly than ever.

"'Well, as I am here, I will have a look at him,' said the doctor.

"He approached the bedside, raised my eyelids—I could see him, though I could not stir—and looked into my eyes. I watched him through an awful film—he felt for my pulse,* and finally applied his stethoscope to my heart. There was a long pause, and then I heard him say the following blessed words:—

"'I don't believe he is dead—there are still sounds of the heart's action, though faint.'

"How I blessed that doctor—his words lifted me from torment to Heaven. He took my hand and suddenly raised my arm into the air—it remained in the position where he had placed it. He again pressed it down, and it fell.

"'This is a case of catalepsy,' he said. 'There can be no certificate of death given at present. Keep the room warm, and at intervals introduce a little nourishment into the mouth by means of a feather. I will come and see the patient again to-morrow.'

"I was told afterwards that I lay in this state for two or three days, and was finally restored to animation by means of electricity. After this had been applied several times, I sat up and opened my eyes.

"Now, sir," continued Fane, taking his handkerchief from his pocket and wiping the moisture from his forehead as he spoke, "but for the fact of the other doctor coming in on the chance to inquire how I was, I might—indeed, I may add, I should—have been buried alive."

"Your story is full of interest,"

I said, "but it has upset you, and the tale is, undoubtedly, a gruesome one. I have listened to it with attention, and find that it confirms my own theory to the letter. Now let us turn to more cheerful topics."

"I cannot do so, doctor. I have told you this story with a reason. You may laugh at me or not, but you have got to hear me out."

"I shall certainly not laugh at you," I answered. "Tell me all that is in your mind."

"I was eighteen when I ran that narrow shave of being buried alive," said Fane; "I am now twenty-eight. Ten years have gone by since that terrible date. When you first saw me at 'The Chase,' what did you think of me, Dr. Halifax?"

"That you were the jolliest, most thoughtless, and happiest youth of my acquaintance," I replied.

He smiled faintly.

"I always take people in," he said. "Over and over, I have been assured that I personate the happy boy to perfection.' Now listen. I am not a boy, I am a man—a man, haunted ever with a terrible and inexpressible dread."

"What is that?" I asked.

"That I shall once again fall into a trance and be really buried alive."

"Oh, come, you talk nonsense," I said, rising as I spoke. "Your nerves are not as strong as they ought to be. I scarcely like to tell you that you ought to be ashamed of yourself, but seeing that you are in perfect health, and are young, and just engaged to the girl you love, it seems to me to be your manifest duty to cast off these dismal imaginings."

"It may be my duty, but, all the same, I cannot do it," he replied, doggedly. "Let me tell you something, sir. It was never your lot to lie as I did in what seemed an iron cage, and to hear your death pronounced when the part of you that felt and suffered was alive and full of vigour. What my tortured spirit underwent during those few hours of that one day I have no words to express. Heavens! I recall the horror now. Scarcely a night passes that the memory of it does not come back to me. There are times when the thought of it, and the inexpressible fear that it may return, almost drive me mad. Just now I am in the full throes of the agony. There are moments when I feel completely overpowered with a premonition of a coming catastrophe—such is my feeling with regard to this visit to Birstdale Abbey. I am convinced that I shall have a cataleptic seizure while there. Now, I know that from a common-sense point of view this is all nonsense; but the fact is, there is not a man living who can reason me out of my conviction."

His hands shook—his troubled eyes sought the ground. Suddenly he looked up at me.

"I believe you pity me?" he said.

"From my heart I do."

"Then will you make me a promise?" he asked, with great eagerness.

"I will do anything in my power to reassure and comfort you."

"If at any time the news of my death should reach you, will you *personally* ascertain beyond doubt that death has actually occurred?"

"You may be far away from me when you die," I answered. "Remember you are many years my junior. I hope it will be your fate to follow, not precede me, into the Land of Shades."

"If you die first, there is nothing more to be said," he replied; "but if you are alive, and if I am anywhere in the British Isles, will you make me a promise that I shall not be buried without your verifying my death?"

I looked him full in the eyes.

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"I will," I answered.

He shivered, and tears of actual relief sprang to his eyes. I laid one of my hands on his broad shoulder.

"Listen to me, Fane. In a case of this kind two words are enough. You have my promise. Now rest happy and turn your thoughts to healthier subjects."

"I will do so—thank you—God bless you!"

He took up his hat and a moment or two later he left me.

A fortnight afterwards I received a letter from him. It was dated from Birstdale Abbey, and was written in a very cheerful and happy vein. He assured me that Pennington made a delightful host—that Alice and he were enjoying themselves to their hearts' content—that the weather was crisp and fine, and that his own health was much better.

"Pennington is a good fellow," he said, in conclusion. "I am almost certain to get that foreign post. If such is the case, our marriage need not be deferred more than a couple of years—Alice is only eighteen now, and she will not at all mind waiting. Pennington quite acts like a father to her, and she assures me that she likes him far better in that capacity than in that of a lover. We are likely to stay here for another month. If you will allow me, I will call to see you when I return to London. — Yours sincerely, CHARLIE FANE."

There was a P.S. to the letter, which ran as follows:—

"I have not forgotten your promise, doctor—it lifts an enormous weight from my mind."

I received this letter at breakfast time, but had not time to read it until I was going my rounds in the afternoon. I was pleased to learn that things were going well with the young pair, and also that Fane was overcoming the morbid distress which if indulged in might destroy the peace of his life. It was on the evening of that same day that my servant brought in an evening paper, and laid it as usual on my writing-table. I took it up, and opening it at random, my eyes fell on the following words:—

"SAD ACCIDENT FROM DROWNING.—Mr. Charles Fane, a young man of about twenty-eight years of age, met his death in a tragic manner on Tuesday night on Loch Ardtry. The weather was exceptionally fine, and the young gentleman went out duck-shooting by moonlight. His boat evidently sprang a leak, and must have filled with water when in the middle of the lake. The unfortunate

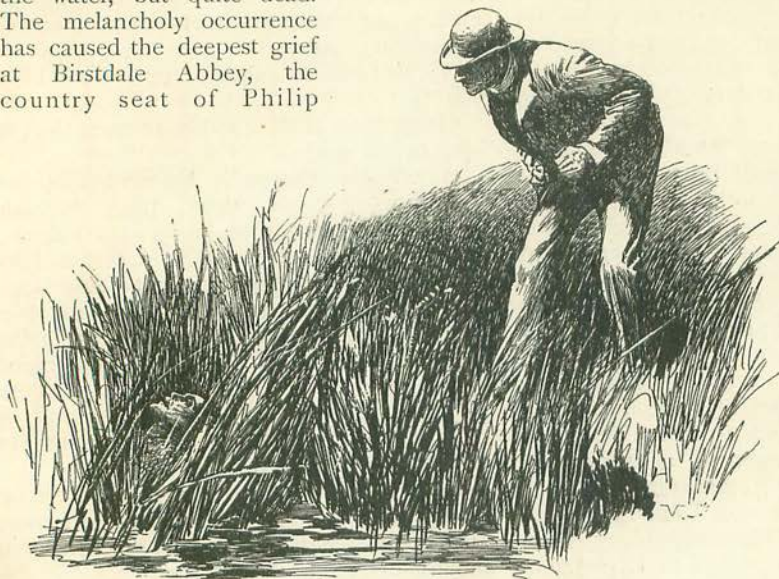
man started to swim for the shore, but the exertion and shock must have caused failure of the heart's action, for he was discovered early on Wednesday morning clinging to some water-weeds with his head well out of the water, but quite dead. The melancholy occurrence has caused the deepest grief at Birstdale Abbey, the country seat of Philip

had already suffered from trance. Certainly this death must be verified, and the duty lay with me. I rang the bell sharply—Harris entered with a telegram.

"The messenger is waiting," he said.

I opened the little missive, and saw to my dismay that it was a request that I should immediately visit a patient about thirty miles out of London who was taken with an apoplectic seizure. I could not go north that night. I sent a reply to the telegram, naming the train by which I would arrive at Dorking, and then stretching out my hand prepared to fill in another form. I had a moment of anxious thought before doing this.

After a little reflection



"HE WAS DISCOVERED CLINGING TO SOME WATER-WEEDS."

Pennington, Esq., where Mr. Fane was staying."

I read the paragraph with horror—the paper fell from my hands. In the room in which I now sat, Fane had talked to me less than three weeks ago, telling me of his premonition of a coming catastrophe. I had naturally thought nothing of his fears. Poor youth! as the sequel showed, he had reason for them. He was dead—he had died from drowning. Was he dead? I started up with impatience—I remembered my promise.

"I must see to this," I murmured to myself; "the lad trusted me. That death must be verified."

I stooped and lifted up the paper which lay on the floor and carefully read the paragraph over again.

"Failure of the heart's action," I repeated. "When the body was found the head was well out of the water."

When I examined Fane's heart a short time ago it was in a perfectly healthy condition; he was a man of robust frame, in the prime of youth. Would his heart's action be likely to fail to the extent of causing death during a short swim? Then, on the other hand, his was the temperament most favourable to the cataleptic state. He

I decided to address my second telegram to Miss Lefroy. It ran as follows:—

"Have just seen account of accident in *Westminster Gazette*. Defer funeral until my arrival.—HALIFAX."

Both my telegrams being dispatched, I soon afterwards went off to visit my patient in the country. I found him dangerously ill, and saw that there was no chance of my leaving him that night, nor probably during the following day. The case was one of life or death, and it was impossible for me to trust it to the hands of another. Nevertheless, my promise to poor young Fane kept always rising up before me. At any cost it must be fulfilled. Harris brought me down my letters on the following morning, and amongst them was a telegram from Miss Lefroy.

"Mr. Pennington does not wish to postpone funeral—I am distracted—come at once," she wired.

To this telegram I sent an instant reply—I addressed it now boldly to Pennington himself—it ran as follows:—

"I am under a promise to verify the death of Charles Fane, but am unfortunately detained here with an anxious case. Impossible for me to go north to-day. Get local

doctor to verify death by opening vein.—CLIFFORD HALIFAX."

I sent off the telegram, but my uneasiness continued. As the hours of the day flew by, and the patient, for whom I was fighting death inch by inch, grew gradually worse and worse, I could not help thinking of the bright-looking, happy-faced young man who yet in some ways had such a sombre history. Again and again the question forced itself upon me—Is he really dead? May not this, after all, be a second condition of trance?

At three o'clock that afternoon my patient died. I returned to town by the next train, having made up my mind to go down to Birstdale Abbey that night. When I arrived at home, Harris told me that a gentleman had called to see me who expressed regret at my absence, but said he would look in again later—he gave no name. On my consulting-room table, amongst a pile of letters, lay one telegram. I opened it first—it was from Miss Lefroy.

"Why don't you come? Dr. Bland will not open vein. Coffin is to be screwed down to-night. I don't think he is dead.—ALICE LEFROY."

"Harris," I said, "wait one moment. I must write a telegram, which you are to send off immediately."

I wrote one quickly, addressing it to Miss Lefroy. It ran thus:—

"Am starting by the 9.15 from St. Pancras. Do not have lid of coffin screwed on.—HALIFAX."

I had scarcely written the words, and Harris was about to leave the room with the telegram, when there came a ring at my front door; he went to open it, and the next moment a tall, aristocratic-looking man of middle age was ushered into my presence. He came up to me with a certain eagerness, and yet with an undeniable self-repression of manner.

"I must introduce myself," he said; "my name is Philip Pennington."

I was startled at seeing him, but, concealing any evidence of emotion, asked him to seat himself.

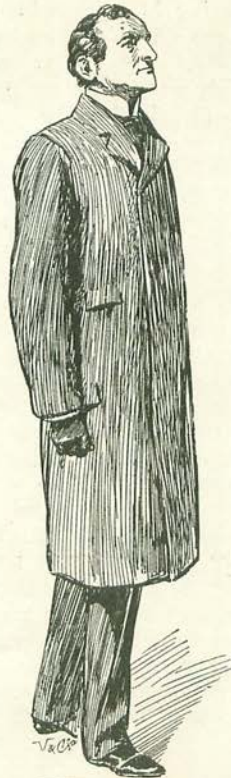
"I am glad you have called," I answered, "and you are just in time—I am about to start for your part of the world."

"I thought that highly probable," he said, "and have come here now on purpose to save you the trouble. I received your telegram at the station to-day, just when I was leaving for London—I thought the best thing I could do would be to answer it in person: but in order to assure you that no stone has been left unturned, I sent a messenger on with it to our local doctor, Bland, who, superfluous as it is, has doubtless acceded to your strange request. The poor fellow is to be conveyed to his father's place in Somersetshire early to-morrow, and the coffin, by my orders, will be fastened down to-night."

"That cannot be," I replied; "I am under a promise to Fane to verify the death. I feared this morning that I could not do so in person, but the patient who was then detaining me has since died, and I am at liberty to start for the north. I shall have just time to catch the 9.15 train, and can examine the body early in the morning."

As I was speaking Pennington looked disturbed. He had the sort of face which can best be described as a wooden mask—the features were regular and even handsome—the eyes full and well shaped—the man wore his years lightly, too, not looking to the casual observer anything like the age I believed him to be; but the absence of all expression—the extreme thinness of the lips, and a certain sinister cast of the eyes inclined me not to trust him from the first. As I looked at him I understood Fane's antipathy, and wondered how, under any circumstances, Alice Lefroy could have promised herself to this man. He sat calmly in his chair now—his mental depression only visible in a certain twitch of his lips, which a man less cognizant of the human physiognomy might never have observed. While I was reading him, he was evidently reading me—his eyes travelled to a little clock on the mantelpiece which pointed to twenty minutes after eight—in a very few moments I must start for St. Pancras, if I would catch the 9.15 train.

"You will doubtless understand for yourself, doctor," he said, speaking slowly, and



PHILIP PENNINGTON.

perhaps with the idea of killing time, "that I can have no possible dislike to your making any experiments on the body of poor young Fane. His death is most tragic, and has filled us all with the most lively sense of grief; but as he is dead—dead beyond recall—it seems to me unnecessary to excite false hopes and to waste the valuable time of a busy London doctor, on what must certainly prove a wild-goose chase."

"I understand," I answered, "but a promise is a promise, Mr. Pennington. I am obliged to you for calling, and would, perhaps, feel less inclined to go to Birstdale Abbey if my telegram of this morning had been attended to. Had your local doctor opened the vein and thus proved death beyond doubt, I should have felt that I had kept my promise to poor Fane to the best of my ability."

"Why do you assume that he has not done so?" asked Pennington.

I stretched out my hand, and taking Miss Lefroy's telegram from the table, gave it to him to read.

His thin lips twitched most visibly then, and I saw his eyelids jerk as if he had received a sort of shock.

"Then you insist on going north?" he said, abruptly.

"I do, and, pardon me, I have not a moment to lose—I have only just time to catch my train."

Pennington shrugged his shoulders.

"I can say nothing further," he answered. "I came up to town this morning to make some arrangements with regard to the funeral. As you are going to Birstdale Abbey, doctor, of course, you must come as my guest—I am also returning by the 9.15 train."

"Then will you share my hansom?" I asked.

"With pleasure," he replied.

A moment or two later we were bowling away as quickly as possible to St. Pancras Station. My companion's manner had now completely altered; he was the suave and agreeable man of the world. He kept up a continued strain of light conversation, touching, with much intelligence and force of observation, on many subjects of the day. He was a well-read man, and, I also perceived, a somewhat profound thinker. All through the conversation, however, I could not fail to perceive that he was still evidently on guard, also that he was watching me. At St. Pancras he left me for a few minutes, and I presently saw him issue out of the telegraph office. He was doubtless sending a telegram

to countermand my order with regard to the coffin. If it were screwed down before we arrived, all would be lost.

I am certainly not given to premonitions, but I had a premonition almost from the moment that I heard of poor Fane's accident that he was not really dead; there was an uncomfortable want of certainty about the whole thing which made me anxious, for my own sake as well as because I had given a promise, to see this thing out myself. There is much talk at the present day of premature interment, and although far more than half the stories are utterly unworthy of credence, there is a substratum of truth in this horror, which ought to receive more serious attention than it has hitherto done. At rare intervals people in a state of trance have been committed to the grave. If Fane were only in a cataleptic state (and if a shock had produced it once, it surely might do so a second time), the fact of screwing down the coffin lid would make the assumed death in a few moments an actual one. Our train would start in three minutes. I looked full at Pennington when he came up to my side.

"You will forgive my asking you a blunt question?" I said.

"Ask what you please, Dr. Halifax," he replied, drawing himself up and looking me straight in the eyes.

"Have you sent a telegram to the Abbey countermanding my order?"

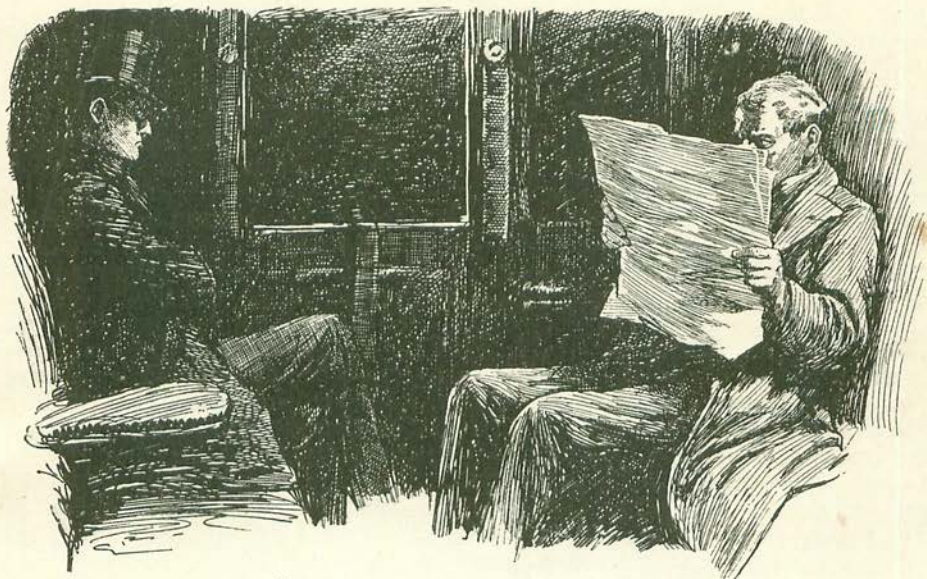
"I have not," he said, without the smallest hesitation.

There was nothing further to be said, but I knew the man lied to me. The next moment we took our seats in the railway carriage and were soon steaming out of London.

My feelings were the reverse of comfortable, but perceiving on reflection that I could now do absolutely nothing, and must wait as best I could the issue of events, I ensconced myself in a corner of the carriage and tried to court sleep. I had been up all the previous night and was naturally very weary, but the state of suspense is not conducive to slumber, and I soon found it hopeless to woo the fickle goddess. Pennington sat opposite to me. We had two fellow-passengers in the other corners of the carriage, but they were both in the land of dreams. Pennington, on the other hand, was as wide-awake as I was. He had provided himself with a small reading lamp, which he now fastened to his side of the carriage, and taking out a copy of the *Times*, pretended to absorb himself in its contents. The light

fell full upon his face, and I was able to watch it without being myself observed. I saw that he was in reality not reading a word. I also perceived that, notwithstanding his outward calm of demeanour, he was in truth a highly nervous man. He must have felt

some hours. I strolled down to the margin of the lake, and one of the first objects that met my horrified eyes was the body of the unfortunate fellow—his head above water—his hands clutching some water-weeds—his eyes shut and his face cold and pallid. I saw



"HE WAS IN REALITY NOT READING A WORD."

my eyes upon him, for he suddenly threw down his paper, and bending forward began to speak to me.

"Yes," he said, "the whole thing was most tragic."

"Tell me how it occurred," I said. "Up to the present, remember, I have only seen the very bald newspaper report."

"I fancy the newspapers have got the exact truth," replied Pennington, in his driest voice. "Fane was in the best of health and the highest spirits on Tuesday. He was, as perhaps you know, an excellent sportsman, and, as the night was fine, he asked my permission to go out duck-shooting on Loch Ardtry. Part of this magnificent piece of water belongs to my property. He intended to be home soon after midnight, and when he did not appear at the given hour, we were none of us specially alarmed. I ordered the side entrance to be left on the latch, and we all went to bed, our natural supposition being that he had found excellent sport and was loth to return home as long as the moon was high in the heavens. I rose early on the following morning, and went out just when the dawn was breaking. I was under the supposition then that Fane had been snug in his bed for

him simultaneously with two gardeners who were on their way to work. We brought him to the house and sent for the doctor. He pronounced life extinct, and said that Fane had probably been dead for some hours. As the body was found with the head above water, the death could not be attributed to drowning, and our doctor supposed it to be due to heart failure. There had, of course, to be a coroner's inquest, which took place on Thursday morning. The verdict was, naturally, death by accident and shock. I think that is the whole story."

"Not quite," I replied. "How did Fane happen to be on the middle of the lake in an unseaworthy boat?"

"Oh, that I can't say," replied Pennington; he turned the sheet of his paper as he spoke. "The boats had not been used for some little time, but I was under the impression that they were all water-tight."

"Then the boat he used sank to the bottom of the lake?"

"Yes."

"Has it been raised?"

"Not yet; we have been too much disturbed to worry about such a trifle as the lost boat."

"Nevertheless, the boat is of great importance," I said. "With your permission, I should wish it to be raised immediately, in order that it may be examined."

"Really, doctor, you are very persistent," said Mr. Pennington, a shade of annoyance flitting for a moment round his thin lips, and as soon vanishing. "Of course, it can be done if you wish it," he added, in a few moments, "that is, when the funeral is over. Do you propose to make a long stay in the north?"

"I shall stay until I have got the business through about which I am coming down," I answered, somewhat shortly.

We relaxed into silence after this, which was broken in about half an hour's time by Pennington, who said, with a profound sigh:—

"Alice has behaved far better than I could have expected."

"She is doubtless sustained by hope," I said.

"What folly this is, doctor; you must know that there can be no possible hope—the man is as dead as a door-nail."

"Nevertheless, she does not think him dead," I replied; "but we will soon see."

An ugly smile crept round his face—he did not reply.

We reached Castleton about four in the morning. Pennington's carriage was waiting for us, and we drove straight to Birstdale Abbey. As we approached the house, I saw that it was well lit up, and even noticed figures flitting behind the blinds. When our carriage wheels were heard crunching the gravel, the entrance door was flung open, a servant appeared, and the next instant a small, girlish figure ran down the steps.

"Alice, you ought to be in bed," said Pennington, in a tone of annoyance.

"Is Dr. Halifax with you?" she asked, pushing him aside.

"Yes, yes; but what does that matter to you? Have you been sitting up all night?"

"Of course I have—do you think

I could rest? Dr. Halifax, please come with me at once."

"Where is he?" I asked.

She took my hand, and began to draw me, to my surprise, away from the house.

"I will take you to view the body, doctor," said Pennington—his eyes shone. "Go to bed, Alice; I insist," he cried.

"I won't obey you," she replied, flinging out her words with great excitement and defiance. "I know now that I have always hated you—I hate you at this moment beyond words to describe. Why did you dare to send that last telegram? Why did you dare to countermand Dr. Halifax's orders? But the coffin is *not* screwed down—I would not allow it. Come, doctor, come at once to the church—his body was laid in the church yesterday. Oh, no, it isn't only his body—not yet, not yet—it is he—himself—he only wants you to awaken him—he is only asleep—I know he is only asleep—come and wake him at once—come, come!"

She clasped my hand with passionate insistence.

Pennington stood back with a startled and stricken look on his face. Miss Lefroy hurried me down a side walk which led to a



"MISS LEFROY HURRIED ME ALONG."

small turnstile. Passing through the stile we found ourselves in the churchyard. It was a little old Norman church, which, I understood afterwards, had belonged to the Penningtons for hundreds of years. The church was situated in the very centre of the estate. Lights shone through the painted glass windows; the porch was open. The excited girl led me right into the sacred building. The interior was well lighted; the brightest light centring round that part where the coffin on trestles stood. It was a massive coffin; the shell was inclosed in lead, covered with oak; the heavy lid lay on the ground beneath. The coffin was placed in the centre of the chancel. A middle-aged servant, who looked as if she had been crying bitterly, was standing by. When she saw Alice enter, and observed that I was with her, she uttered an exclamation of thankfulness.

"Is this the good doctor you have been expecting, Miss Lefroy?" she asked.

"Yes, Merriman," replied the young lady, "this is Dr. Halifax. He has come in time, after all—my efforts were not in vain—oh, how thankful I am! Now my darling will awaken from his sleep."

"Poor young lady," said the servant—she gave me a meaning glance as she spoke. "Poor Miss Alice, she has got the notion that Mr. Fane is only asleep; she has got it on the brain, sir, she really has."

"Please stand aside," I answered.

I went close to the coffin and looked earnestly down at the dead man's face.

"He is asleep, is he not?" repeated Alice, coming up to my side, laying her hand on my arm, and glancing first at me, and then at the dead face of her lover. "See for yourself—he only sleeps. How lifelike he looks. There is even colour in his lips. You will awaken him, won't you, doctor?"

"Poor thing, she has got it on the brain," mumbled the servant.

"Move a little away, please," I said to Miss Lefroy.

When she did so, I bent more closely over the coffin—I took the hand of the dead man in mine—it was cold and stiff—the face looked rigid—my heart sank. I could not bear to meet the agonized look in Alice Lefroy's beautiful eyes.

"After all, I greatly fear the poor fellow is dead," I said to myself. "Were it not that he has already had a cataleptic fit—were it not—but, stay—the rigidity in that hand is, after all, not quite the rigidity of the dead."

My heart beat with renewed hope. I

dropped the cold hand. Miss Lefroy was looking at me with a face of such anguish that I felt certain she would faint if I did not quickly ask her to leave the church.

"He is alive—do say he is alive?" she questioned, in an almost voiceless whisper.

"I cannot say at present," I answered, "but if you will leave me I will tell you in a moment or two. I now am going to make an experiment, but cannot do so until you go. Take Miss Lefroy into the vestry-room for a few moments," I said, turning to the servant.

"No, I will stay," answered Alice.

"But I would prefer that you left me. Go now, like a good girl."

She turned then without another word. The dead man and I were alone in the church. Was the man in his coffin really dead? I should soon know. If he were alive, he was simulating death as few had done—nevertheless, he must have the chance I had promised him. I would open one of the veins. I took a case of instruments out of my pocket. As I did so, I heard the creaking noise of a door being softly shut. Pennington was coming up the aisle of the church on tip-toe. I waited for him to approach the coffin. He did so, coming close to me and looking down with a smile on his face at the dead face below.

"You see now," he said, slowly, "how much of your valuable time you have wasted in coming all this way to look at a dead man—you see also how cruelly and wantonly you have awakened false hopes!"

"Not quite yet," I answered; "stand aside, will you?"

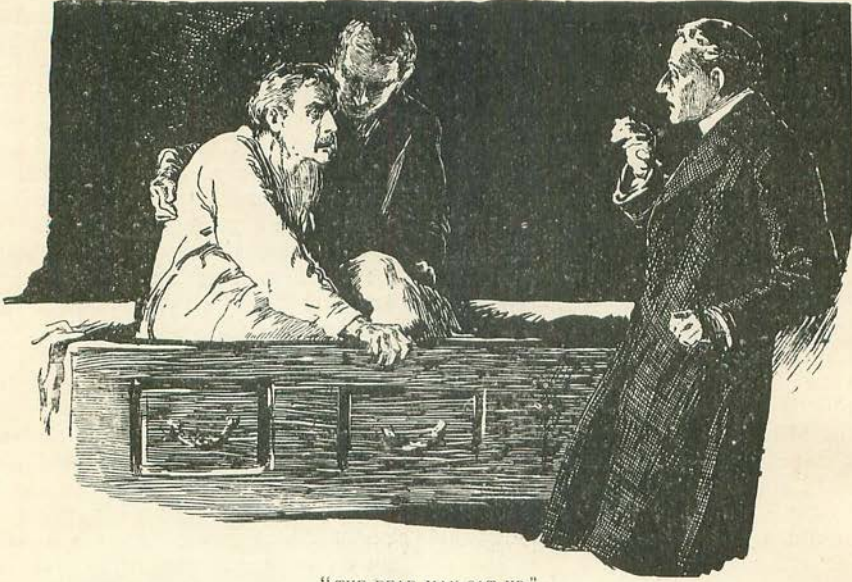
As I spoke I bared the arm of the dead, and taking out my lancet carefully opened a superficial vein in the forearm. I heard Pennington laugh satirically—I had no time to notice his laughter then. I waited with a beating heart for the result. Would that imprisoned blood ever flow again? Had the man been in full life and health it would have flowed freely enough from the wound. The first few seconds after the division of the vein were some of the longest I ever lived through; then my heart gave a leap of triumph—a drop of blood oozed through the opening, then another, then another. Slowly, sluggishly, faintly, the blood dropped and dropped on the white winding-sheet—after the first couple of minutes it began to flow in a languid stream. I carefully raised the head. The next moment, to Pennington's horror, the dead man sat up.

Three months afterwards I received a visit

from Fane in Harley Street. He was in perfect health, and his spirits were as high as I had ever seen them.

"You have not only saved my life," he

"Ah!" he replied, his bright face suddenly becoming grave; he came up to my side and spoke almost in a whisper. "Did you know that a hole, about the size of a pea, was



"THE DEAD MAN SAT UP."

said, after he had spoken to me for a few moments, "but you have done more—you have absolutely removed the awful horror under which I lived for the last ten years. I do not expect that I shall be laid out for dead a third time before the event really takes place."

"With the passing of the horror, the tendency to catalepsy has doubtless vanished," I replied. "I am more glad than I can tell you. That was a lucky visit of mine to the north."

found, evidently drilled in the bottom of the boat?" he said.

I started, but did not reply.

"It is true," he continued. "I dare not ask myself what it means."

"Be satisfied to leave that mystery alone," I said, after a brief pause. "You are a happy man—you are going to have a happy future. God Himself took the matter into His hands when He rescued you as He did from the very jaws of death."