

The Adventures of a Man of Science.

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

We have taken down these stories from time to time as our friend, Paul Gilchrist, has related them to us. He is a man whose life study has been science in its most interesting forms—he is also a keen observer of human nature and a noted traveller. He has an unbounded sympathy for his kind, and it has been his lot to be consulted on many occasions by all sorts and conditions of men.

II.—OUGHT HE TO MARRY HER?



MY small laboratory in Bloomsbury has been the source of more than one interesting experiment. I have worked the X rays, and have caught some glimpses of the infinite possibilities of the new discovery, but no subjects interest me so much as those which relate to biology, and of late my whole attention has been turned to the new future which the treatment of disease by animal extract affords.

The subject in its full intensity is naturally more in the line of the ordinary medical man than myself, but if I am not a biologist in the full sense of the word, I am nothing, and it has often seemed to me that the scientific man of leisure has more opportunity for making experiments and working up valuable discoveries, than his brother who is in the thick of the battle-field itself. The following story, which bears fully on the subject of this new discovery, absorbed my keenest attention at the time, and I cannot forbear from giving it here:—

On a certain evening in the month of May, my friend Dr. Everzard and I were seated together in his private study. We had been engaged in an interesting discussion, and I had been telling him of experiments which I had been fortunate enough to complete.

"Yes," he said, with eagerness, "I fully believe that there is a great future before this theory of treating disease by animal extract, and I shall be greatly surprised if it does not prove of marked use in the case of the insane."

"That is the very point I am coming to," I answered. "With all our knowledge we must confess that at the present moment we know little or nothing of the marvellous structure of the human brain. Until we are better acquainted with its functions, you doctors will be in the dark as far as the real treatment of insanity is concerned."

"I am by no means sure that light is not coming," answered Dr. Everzard. "Brain disease is often due, I feel sure, to functional disturbance and consequent mal-nutrition of

certain centres. We see this plainly in cases of epilepsy, hysteria, etc. If we can, therefore, ascertain where the brain is at fault, there is a rational deduction and line of treatment pointed out."

I thought over these words for a moment; meanwhile, Everzard gave a quick glance at his watch.

"How the time has flown," he said, "we have neither of us another moment to waste. Pray, Gilchrist, hurry up to your room and get into your evening dress. If we don't both hasten we shall not be in the ball-room when the strains of the first waltz strike up. I cannot afford to be absent. You know your way to your room, don't you?"

I said I did, and hurried off to dress as fast as I could. This was the night when the great annual ball was held at Fairleigh Manor, and when the county were invited to attend the function.

Fairleigh Manor is one of the most beautiful places in the south-west of England. It possesses something like ninety acres of pleasure grounds, and the house itself is old and full of historical interest. On ordinary occasions, however, the high walls which surround the pleasure grounds, the wrought-iron gates, and the general air of seclusion, cast a certain gloom over the lovely place.

Dr. Everzard is much respected in the neighbourhood, but it is well known that he has a queer strain about him. Fairleigh Manor belongs to him, he is known to be a very wealthy man—he has refused to marry, and has turned his own place into nothing more or less than a large lunatic asylum. There are all sorts of theories to account for this, the favourite one being that there is really concealed insanity in Everzard's own family. To the outward eye, however, the gloom of the place does not affect its owner—he is a bright, keen-looking man of about forty years of age. Not only does he attend to his patients, but he is on the local board of magistrates, and attends church at least once every Sunday. There is nothing of importance which goes on in the district that he does not take part in, his activity

being something wonderful. To look at him one can see that he is all on wires. His patients adore him, and he has the satisfaction of performing many permanent cures. The life at the Manor is all that is luxurious, the terms are reasonable, and the restraint as slight as possible. Moral suasion is brought to bear whenever moral suasion can effect its object; and Everzard, I know for a fact, often spends the short hours in earnest endeavours to lift the veil which separates the sane man from his insane brother.

He is a special friend of mine, and I am fond of running down to the Manor whenever I can spare the time to spend a couple of nights there.

On this occasion I was in time for the annual ball. Once a year the beautiful place is really thrown open—the dangerous patients disappear, no one cares to inquire where or how; but all those patients who are sufficiently well can once more sun themselves in the public gaze. Not only the splendid house itself, but the stately grounds, are got ready for the reception of guests.

On this particular night, having dressed, I ran downstairs. I lifted a curtain, and found myself in the great ball-room. Just within the entrance my eyes lighted on my friend Everzard and a particularly graceful, fair-haired woman of about thirty-five years of age. They were talking earnestly together,

and I noticed that Everzard's eyes lightened, and his face seemed to contract with some displeasure as he conversed. The moment he saw me a look of relief passed over his features, and he came a step or two forward to meet me.

"Gilchrist," he said, "allow me to introduce you to Mrs. Joliffe. Mrs. Joliffe, this is my old friend, Paul Gilchrist."

"I am very glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Gilchrist," answered Mrs. Joliffe. She raised two sky-blue eyes to my face; a colour of the faintest rose mantled her cheeks for a moment, then left them with a lovely creamy pallor.

We stepped out through an open window, and Mrs. Joliffe leant against a pillar round which a lovely "Gloire de Dijon" climbed. It was just coming into flower, and she pulled one of the half-open buds and began to pick it absently to pieces.

"What are you doing in your world now?" she said.

"In my world?" I answered, startled by her tone, and at the flashing light which came and went in her peculiarly blue eyes.

She laughed—her laughter was as sweet as a silver bell.

"Ah," she said, "did I not see you talking to Dr. Everzard? You know my story, or at least some of it. You know that I am one of the unfortunate victims who live in this outward paradise—in reality, in this gilded prison."

"I am truly sorry for you," I said.

"Pray don't be that," she interrupted, "I am leaving here next week. Thanks to our good doctor's care I no longer belong to the insane members of the public. Now you understand why I asked my question. I do not wish to appear ignorant when I leave Fairleigh Manor. Please tell me what they are doing now in your world."

She laid her small hand confidently on my arm.

"Let us walk up and down," she said, "it is quite sheltered on this terrace. Now, please, tell me."



"THEY WERE TALKING EARNESTLY TOGETHER."

"What about?" I asked.

"Oh, anything—not Parliamentary news, of course, but society gossip, little scandals, the 'bon mots' of polite life. What is the subject which interests most now in the London drawing-room, for instance?"

I began to relate one or two of the topics of the day.

She gazed at me while I was speaking with large, interested, wondering eyes.

"How nice," she said, "how I shall enjoy it all again! Of course no place, *for a lunatic*, could go beyond this, but when one is cured one can really enjoy life to the full. By the way, Mr. Gilchrist, you hold a somewhat unique position in London society, do you not?"

"Not that I know of," I answered, with a laugh.

"Let me see," she continued, holding up one of her pretty little hands, and beginning to count on her fingers; "you work hard, and yet you have so much money that you find it unnecessary to earn your own living."

"There is nothing very uncommon in that," I replied.

"Don't interrupt me. You are a noted traveller—you are partly of foreign extraction—your mother was not an Englishwoman, in consequence you have the foreigner's gift for languages; you know several."

"Nevertheless, in these days, such a fact does not put me out of the common run," I replied.

"Don't interrupt me, please; I have something further to say. You know the secrets of our prison-house, and yet you do not belong to us."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this: you have lifted the curtain which shows the hideous reality of disease, mental or physical, and yet in the ordinary sense of the word, you are not a doctor."

"Heaven forbid," I replied.

"Why do you say that? Why should you not help your fellow creatures?"

"It is my delight to help them when in my power," I said.

"Is that indeed so?" She looked at me with quite a glitter in her eyes. "Perhaps some day," she added, after a pause, "we may meet again, and it may be in your province to render me assistance."

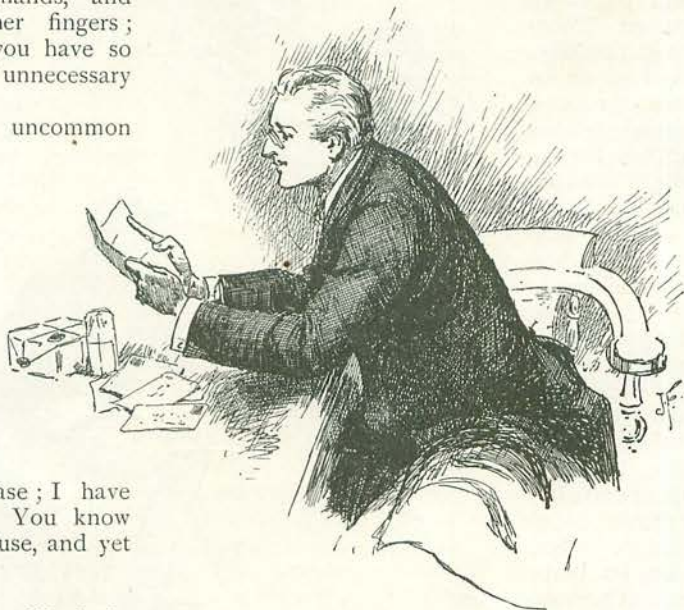
"If it is, be sure that I will do my utmost for you," I answered.

I had scarcely said the words before a neighbouring squire came up to take Mrs. Joliffe in to dance, and I had no opportunity of talking to her again that evening.

Early the next morning I left the Manor, but on my way up to town, the recollection of her somewhat strange face kept flashing again and again before my memory.

When I returned to town I found a letter awaiting me from my friend, Lucian Maxwell. He and I had spent a whole year travelling together in the Himalayas, and there were few men whom I knew better. I opened his letter now with eagerness, its contents were calculated to surprise me.

"When you read this, my dear Gilchrist, you will doubtless be astonished," he wrote. "I am about to enter immediately into the



"ITS CONTENTS WERE CALCULATED TO SURPRISE ME."

holy state of matrimony. I, who vowed against the whole thing for so long, am at last caught in the toils. My only excuse is that Laura is unlike any other girl I ever met. Fairer, braver, and, I believe, more noble. I really flatter myself that these are not altogether lovers' raptures. Gilchrist, you must see her for yourself. I write now to claim the performance of an offer you once made to act in the capacity of my best man should I ever break my vow. We are to be married in exactly three weeks, and as Laura has no settled home, the wedding

will take place from my place in Derbyshire. Pray write at once to say that you will be at my service on the 25th of June."

I threw down the letter, went to my diary, looked up the date, marked it with a red cross, and then wrote to my friend telling him that I would certainly be present at the wedding, and would be only too glad to make the acquaintance of his future bride.

Maxwell was as fine a fellow as I have often met, but he was not without a curious crank in his disposition. He was good-looking, well-off, with a family history above reproach, but he had some curious views on many subjects, and in particular with regard to women. From his earliest days he had been fond of making mental sketches of his future wife. This impossible creation, as I used to consider her, must possess in all things the happy mean, being neither too young nor too old, too clever nor too silly. She must be feminine without being prudish. She must be brave without possessing any of the attributes of the New Woman. In short, as I often said to Maxwell, his future wife must come straight down from Heaven, for in no other way could he obtain the perfect woman whom he hoped some day might own his name and be the mother of his children. Now, it appeared that he had discovered this pearl of great price, and that her feet really trod the earth.

"No doubt the girl is as commonplace as possible," I said to myself. "Maxwell has fallen in love, and he sees her through false

glasses. Well, I shall soon know for myself." I wrote the usual congratulatory letter, and prepared to go to Combe Ashley the last week in June.

On the afternoon of the 23rd, I started for my friend's place; I arrived in good time, but to my surprise no one met me at the little wayside station, which was distant about two miles from the house. As the afternoon was a particularly fine one I desired my luggage to be sent after me and walked across the fields to Combe Ashley. My way led me through a pine-wood, which was just then in the perfection of its summer foliage. Thankful for the shade, I sat down for a moment under a tree, and taking out my sketch-book, was preparing to make a sketch when I was startled by the sound of a woman's cough. I raised my eyes, and then started quickly to my feet, for the bright and glittering blue orbs of Mrs. Joliffe were eagerly fixed on my face.

"Ah," she said, coming forward and giving a slight theatrical laugh, "I thought it quite likely that you would take this short cut. That is well;

I shall be able to have a little conversation with you before we join the rest of the visitors."

"How do you do?" I said, "I am surprised to see you here."

"Are you?" she replied; "well, I can account for my presence very

easily. But before I say another word it is my turn to ask you a question."

"What is that?"

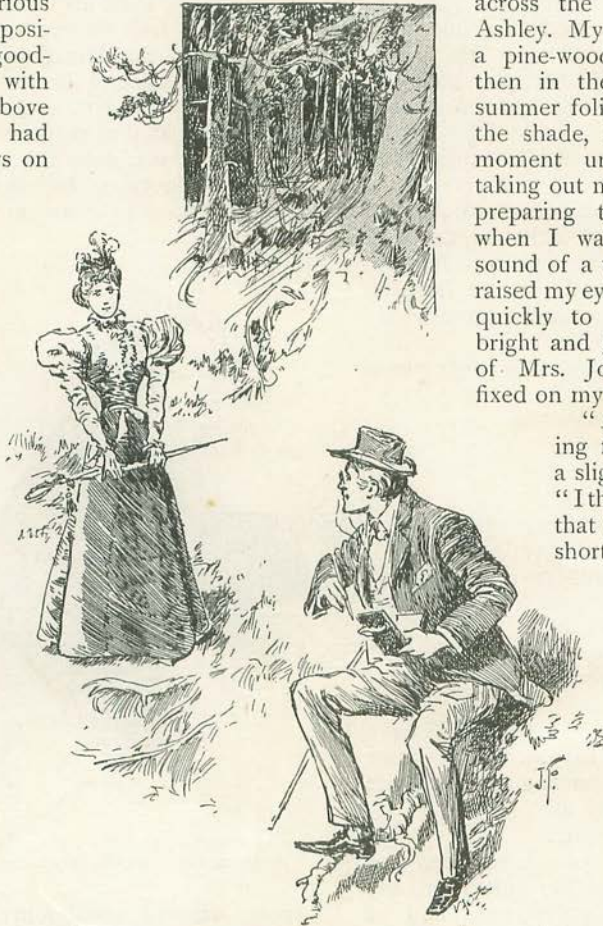
She came close to me, and looked up into my eyes with a peculiar gaze.

"Do you remember where you saw me last?"

"Perfectly well."

"I want you to keep that fact a secret."

"I shall certainly have no object in betray-



"I WAS STARTLED BY THE SOUND OF A WOMAN'S COUGH."

ing it," I answered, speaking abruptly, and with some annoyance, for her manner irritated me, I did not know why.

"That is good. You have promised, remember, to respect that most important secret. I am here as a guest, and not a soul in the house, with the exception of yourself, knows my previous history. I do not choose that anyone shall know. When I heard you were coming here I will confess that I got a considerable start; then it occurred to me that I might manage to meet you before you met any of the other guests, or, in particular, before you had any communication with our charming host, Lucian Maxwell. I have managed this, and you have promised to respect my secret, so all is well. Now, will you sit down and let me sit near you, I have a good deal to say."

I motioned her to avail herself of a mossy bank which sloped away from one of the pine trees. She sat down without a word, and I placed myself at a little distance.

"Now," she began, eagerly, "I must say what I have come to say in as few words as possible. You wonder that I am here—I will tell you. What more natural than that a mother should be in the house with her child, just before that child's wedding?"

"What can you mean?" I asked, surprise and fear on my face.

"Exactly what I say. I have got a daughter, a beautiful daughter—her name is Laura, she is to marry Lucian Maxwell the day after to-morrow."

"Your daughter is to marry Lucian Maxwell," I repeated.

"Yes, pray don't look so stunned; when you see her you will quite forgive your friend's indiscretion."

"It is not that," I replied. I turned my face away. Like a flash a memory rose before my mental vision. If there was a subject on which Maxwell, in my opinion, was a little over-particular, it was on the dreaded topic of heredity. Over and over again had he been fond of assuring me that far rather would he allow his ancient house to die out of existence than bring serious disease into his family. When I last saw Mrs. Joliffe she had been confined in a lunatic asylum. She had met me now in order to wring a promise from me that I would not acquaint Lucian Maxwell with this fact. I had given her the promise without knowing what it involved. Ought I to keep it?

My eyes met her's.

"You think I have trapped you?" she

said. "Well, I meant to do so. Now, remember, I hold you to your word; you are not to betray what you know about me. Lucian Maxwell is a special friend of yours. He told me last night with what pleasure he looked forward to your visit. He spoke of the old friendship which existed between you, and said that his crowning bliss would not be there unless you accompanied him to the altar. Those were strong words, and they meant a great deal. Lucian, in my opinion, is one of the best of men; he is the very husband of all others I desire for Laura. She is to marry him on the 25th—you quite understand?"

I did not speak.

"If he knew all that you know about me that wedding would never take place."

"Mrs. Joliffe," I said, suddenly, "is it right to keep Maxwell in the dark?"

She laughed. Then the colour flooded her thin, excited face.

"From my point of view it is perfectly right," she said. "Now I mean to take you into my confidence. You met me a month ago at a ball at Dr. Everzard's house—beyond that one fact you know nothing whatever about me."

"That is perfectly true," I replied. "Everzard, of course, mentioned to me that you were one of his patients."

"Yes—I wish he had not done so—that, alas, signifies a great deal. Now listen to me attentively. When I heard last evening that you were expected here, not only as a guest, but as the special, indeed the chief, friend of the bridegroom, I experienced a sensation of agony, which you, with your cool, well-balanced life, can little understand. The object of many long years, the hope so soon to be realized, the reward for self-denial the most intense, of horrors all cheerfully borne because one result was to be the consequence, seemed about to be shattered by a single blow. Then I remembered your face, which appeared to me to be strong as well as kind. I also recalled a remark made by you to me, that whenever it was in your power it was your pleasure to help your fellow-creatures. Mr. Gilchrist, it is now in your power to render me assistance. The opportunity which you wished for has arrived. You see before you a very miserable and a most anxious woman. I claim your sympathy and I demand your help."

"Pray be assured that there is nothing I would not do for you," I replied, "but the promise you have just wrung from me, Mrs. Joliffe, means injustice to my friend. If

ever there was a man fastidious, over-sensitive on the subject of family history, Maxwell is that person. Is it right to him, is it right to your daughter, to allow them to marry without his knowing the girl's true family history?"

"I repeat, that from my point of view it is perfectly right. Laura is to marry Lucian Maxwell the day after to-morrow. By a mere accident you have got hold of my secret. I insist on your keeping your promise. I expect you to respect it as a man of honour. I have one child. She represents my all of hope, of love—she is my only treasure. She knows nothing whatever of the unhappy doom which hangs over me. She is beautiful, lovable, worthy of the best that life can offer her. I say once for all, that I will not have her happiness tampered with. She is much attached to Lucian, who thinks her perfect—he shall marry her knowing nothing whatever of my unhappy history. I demand your silence."

"This places me in a most unhappy dilemma," I said.

"I am sorry for you; but what is your dilemma to mine? Now, I want to take you further into my confidence. You met me at Fairleigh Manor?"

"Yes, and Everzard gave me to understand that at times you suffer from want of control over your emotions. Perhaps, after all," I added, eagerly, "your mania may be of a very slight character."

"If so, would my liberty have been taken from me? No, do not flatter yourself that it is anything of the sort. At a moment like the present there is no use in mincing matters. You shall know the simple truth. The form my mania takes is the following: I am pursued by the most horrible, ghastly fear that I am being poisoned. Each kindly word, each gentle glance, each sympathizing expression, seems to me at such times like the cunning of my deadliest foe. My mania rises to hatred, and unless something is done to arrest its progress, I should think very little of trying myself to take the life of the person whom I imagine is conspiring against me. But I cannot speak of it further. Only an insane person can know what I endure. Even at the present moment, even as I speak to you, I feel the sure approach of the terrible cloud which shuts away the sunshine of my life. I am convinced, however, that I shall be able to control myself until Thursday morning, when I return immediately to Fairleigh Manor."

"And your daughter is quite unaware of all this?" I said.

"Yes. I have managed well, she knows nothing. My husband died soon after her birth, and when my darling was five years old she was taken from me and sent to school. We used to meet occasionally in the holidays, and we always corresponded with regularity. When with her I have hitherto had power to restrain myself. She suspects nothing. Your terrible theory of heredity cannot be correct, for I am convinced my only child will escape my awful fate. I have done all that I could by placing her in the healthiest environments to insure that. But if she is the victim of a cruel blow I cannot answer for the consequence. She is fragile, physically delicate—were you to tell what you know of me to Mr. Maxwell you would, in all probability, render my daughter insane for life."

I rose to my feet.

"You place me in a terrible position," I replied, "but there is no help for it, I will respect your scruples. I only pray Heaven that I am not committing a sin in doing so."

"Be assured that you are acting nobly, Mr. Gilchrist."

Mrs. Joliffe also stood up, she came forward and took one of my hands in hers.

"Heaven bless you," she said. "You have lifted a weight from my mind. My Laura will now be happily married on the 25th, on which day I return to the Manor. Until then not a soul will know, except yourself, of my secret."

"How have you managed to keep Miss Joliffe in ignorance all this time?" I asked.

Mrs. Joliffe laughed.

"Ah, I have been clever," she said. "My girl is under the impression that I have spent all these long years travelling abroad. I have one or two friends on the Continent who have posted my letters to her. You will see for yourself how unnatural, how more than unnatural, it would have been had I not been present at her wedding. Afterwards I shall see little or nothing of her; but my mind will be at ease, she at least will be insured a happy life."

As she said these last words she looked down the pretty vista through the wood. Some people were coming up a narrow path.

"Lucian and some of his friends!" she exclaimed. "Remember, Mr. Gilchrist, I trust you and—and thank you."

She gave me a glance full of gratitude as well as warning, and then, with a light laugh, ran down the path to meet her friends.

"I have been the very first to meet Mr.



"HERE I AM, OLD FELLOW!"

in a long, low, cool conservatory, protected from the sun by heavy blinds, which shut out the greater part of the heat of the June day. A very slender young girl was standing under an open window. She was twirling a rose in her fingers. When she saw Maxwell the rose tumbled to the floor, and she advanced slowly to meet him.

"Here I am, Laura," he cried, "and whom do you think I have brought with me? No less a person than my best man,

Gilchrist," she said, going straight up to Maxwell's side.

"Gilchrist!" exclaimed Maxwell. "Has he come?"

"Here I am, old fellow!" I answered, coming forward.

"But I did not expect you until a later train. Did you walk from the station?"

"Yes, and my luggage is following me."

The colour flooded his thin face—he linked his hand through my arm, and without waiting to apologize to the friends who had accompanied him into the wood, walked away rapidly with me by his side.

"I cannot say how acceptable your presence is," he said, "I have much to tell you, but first of all I want to introduce you to Laura. We will come straight away to her now."

"You look well," I said, by way of reply.

"I never felt better in my life," he answered. "I often told you, did I not, Gilchrist, that my bride could not exist out of Paradise? But there, I have found her at last. Of the earth earthy, thank Providence, but so ethereal, so unworldly, that I think a breath would waft her into Heaven. Come, I see you are smiling, but I assure you these are not mere lovers' raptures. You shall see Laura yourself."

As he spoke, he strode forward with eager steps. The next moment we found ourselves

and," he added, giving me an affectionate glance, "my greatest friend, Paul Gilchrist."

"I have heard of you, of course, and I am glad to meet you," she answered—she raised shy blue eyes to my face. She was, I saw at a glance, her mother in miniature, but her mother with a sort of halo cast over her. The same blue eyes were there with their intense—almost china—colour, but in the girl's case they were shaded and softened by thick long lashes of a perfect black. The delicate arched brows, too, were slightly darker. The hair was bright with the brightness of youth, being of a red-gold, crisp, radiant, full of little tendrils and half-attempts at curls—it softened her white forehead and massed itself in graceful confusion round her pretty head. Her complexion was as pink and white as a bit of Dresden china, but extremely delicate, the colour coming and going in her cheeks at the least emotion. Under her wonderful brilliant eyes, too, there were somewhat dark shadows, which seemed to throw up and intensify their expression, adding to the etherealness and fragility of the face. Angelic was the best word by which to describe this very fair girl, and when I gazed at her I did not wonder at Maxwell's infatuation.

She began to speak to me in a low, sweet voice, and I had not been ten minutes in her society before I discovered something else—I caught a glimpse of what was in the heart

of the mother—the passion, the despair which would even commit a crime if necessary to protect so treasured and beautiful a creature from the rough storms of the world.

“The boat is waiting, Laura; are you inclined for our promised row?” said her lover.

She glanced from Maxwell to me.

“If Mr. Gilchrist will come with us,” she said.

The compliment was so pretty that I could not but accept. We strolled down together to the lake, and spent an hour or more floating about on its glassy surface.

There was to be a ball that night, and Laura was full of the pleasures of the coming dance. Maxwell lay back in the bow of the

brilliant one. Many guests from neighbouring houses had arrived, and the grounds were lighted with Chinese lanterns and many other forms of decoration. Soon after ten o'clock I was standing on the south terrace, when I was startled by a light hand being laid on my arm. I looked round and saw the pretty young bride-elect standing at my side. She was all in white, and looked more ethereal and lovely than ever.

“Can I speak to you?” she asked.

Her voice was very low, and almost unnatural in its tone. Even by the artificial light I could see that she was pale, her lips were trembling.

“Certainly,” I replied. “Where shall we go?”



“LAURA WAS FULL OF THE PLEASURES OF THE COMING DANCE.”

boat contented to watch her as she talked. She had a somewhat slow utterance, each word coming out with a sort of deliberate pause, which gave a curious effect to her slightest sentence. She addressed most of her remarks to me, avoiding, I thought, in a somewhat peculiar way, her lover's glances. Now and then her brows were knit as if in momentary pain; now and then she drooped her sweet lips; and once I was certain that I intercepted a startled light of perplexity and almost terror in her eyes.

I said to myself, however, that I was prejudiced, that the knowledge of the mother's history made me read more than I ought in the daughter's face.

The dance that evening was a particularly

“We need not go anywhere,” she answered. “Let us walk up and down here.”

“But you are cold—you are trembling.”

“I do not tremble from cold,” she replied. “Mr. Gilchrist, I must confide in someone—it is all too horrible. You are Lucian's best friend, are you not?”

“One of his best friends,” I answered. “Why do you ask?”

“How am I to tell you the truth?” she replied. “You know I am to marry him the day after to-morrow?”

“Of course.”

“I will not break off the engagement, for I am no coward. Besides, if my suspicions are true, I shall wish to be able to revenge myself.”

"What do you mean by your suspicions?" I asked, "suspicions against Lucian, the best fellow in the world?"

"Ah," she answered with a laugh, so strange that it curdled me. "You don't know him as well as I do. Lucian is not what he seems. Bend down, for I must not speak aloud. I must on no account inform my poor mother of the awful truth."

"What is it, Miss Joliffe? Speak out, you startle me."

"You will be more startled when you know all. Lucian's love for me has changed—he is trying to poison me."

"What nonsense," I answered. "You must be mad to talk in that way."

The next moment I was sorry that I had used the word. She started away from me, and put up both her hands to her face with a puzzled and terrified gesture.

"Mad," she said, "I mad? What do you mean? It is he, poor fellow, who has lost

said. "There is no use in telling you that your imagination is running away with you, for in your present state of mind you would not believe me. I will speak to Maxwell."

"But you will not tell him that I suspect him? That would make him more cunning than ever."

"No, no, I will say nothing to implicate you; you look dreadfully tired, will you not go to bed?"

"I am terribly exhausted," she answered; "but don't think that I am inventing this, I saw it all too plainly. He carries the poison in his pocket, and only waits for the moment to give it to me. Oh, yes, I shall marry him, and if he persists in his fiendish resolve I know how I can have my revenge."

She laughed again, her bright blue eyes completely altered in expression, they glittered horribly. The laughter had not died away on her lips before Maxwell joined us.

"My darling," he said, putting his hand on Laura's shoulder, "I have been looking for you, you have had no supper—come with me at once, I insist on your having a glass of champagne."

She gave me a glance full of meaning.

"I would rather Mr. Gilchrist took me to supper," she said.

"Well, humour her then, Gilchrist," said Maxwell, raising his brows in momentary surprise. "Laura, I want you to go to bed after you have had some supper."

"Very well, Lucian," she answered, in her peculiarly sweet, low voice.

He gave her an earnest glance which she would not meet. She laid her hand on my arm, and I took her to the supper-room.

"Now," she said, "get me something quickly, I am so hungry. Some chicken and aspic jelly, please, and plenty of champagne."

I supplied her wants, and she ate and drank feverishly. The colour returned to her



"'MAD!' SHE SAID. 'WHAT DO YOU MEAN?'"

his senses. Of course, he cannot know what he is doing. Were he in his ordinary frame of mind he would not act as he has acted more than once during the last couple of days. Only half an hour ago, Mr. Gilchrist, I saw him put a powder into the champagne which he wished me to drink. Oh, it is too terrible; what is to become of me?"

I thought for a moment, and then took my cue.

"You are excited and over-wrought," I

cheeks from the action of the stimulant, and after a time she stood up.

"I am better," she said, "the awful fear is not so haunting."

"When did you feel it first?" I asked.

"On the day my mother and I arrived here, but only very slightly. All to-day, however, the dread has become worse and worse until now it is an assurance. The sight of the powder convinces me. Oh poor, poor, poor mother, she shall never know. I will marry Lucian and hide my misery. Once I loved him well. Oh, why has his love for me turned to hate?"

I saw that she would give way to tears unless I hurried her out of the supper-room.

"Go to bed at once," I said, "I will get to the bottom of this mystery for you. You have confided in me, and I promise to be your friend."

"How kind you are," she said.

She held out her hand, which I grasped. A moment later she had left me.

I hurried off to the ball-room, where I met Mrs. Joliffe.

"Are you engaged for the next dance?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied, looking at her programme, "but I don't want to dance. I shall throw my partner over. This place is over-heated; let us go out of doors."

I accompanied her.

"Mrs. Joliffe," I said, the moment we got outside, "you must be prepared for a very painful piece of information."

"That you do not intend to keep your word?" she said.

"It has nothing to do with that. You are a brave woman, and I am sure you will take what I am about to tell you bravely."

Her face turned pale; she pressed one hand against her heart.

"I am accustomed to shocks," she said. "I know what you have come to tell me. Lucian has discovered my secret."

"He knows nothing, all your suspicions are wide of the mark; what I have to tell you is far more terrible."

"Good heavens! speak!" she cried.

"Your daughter——"

"Laura? What of her? Is she ill?"

"In one sense she is very ill. Mrs. Joliffe, she inherits your malady. To-night she gave way to an aggressive form of the madness which at intervals wrecks your life."

"Impossible!" said the miserable woman. She stepped back a few paces and looked up at me with glittering eyes. I gave her a

faithful version of the incident which had just taken place. When I had done speaking she covered her face with her hands.

"Has all my suffering and my self-denial been in vain, then?" she cried. "All the years of loneliness, of horror, have not been sufficient to avert the curse. Oh, my God! why should it fall on her—on her, my innocent angel? Was not one victim enough? What is to become of me?"

"Try to calm yourself and listen to me," I said. "Mrs. Joliffe, I do not think this marriage ought to go on."

"Mr. Gilchrist, it must go on. I think of no one but Laura, and you are bound in honour not to betray me. I know, none better, the workings of the insidious and terrible malady. Have I not gone through it all?—Laura feels badly to-night, but to-morrow in all probability she will be her own happy self again. The attacks at first are always slight. Laura will be quite well to-morrow, that is, unless she gets a shock. If she gets a shock now she will be a maniac for life. Mr. Gilchrist, I hold you to your promise."

I was silent.

"You are bound in honour, I hold you to your promise," repeated the unhappy woman.

"What can be the matter?" said Maxwell's voice at that moment. "Why, Gilchrist, you look quite pale; Mrs. Joliffe, I have come to claim you, this is our dance, is it not?"

She put her hand on his arm, made some light and laughing remark, and turned away.

I went upstairs to my own room.

It is needless to say that, during that night, no sleep visited my eyes. My position was sufficiently embarrassing to test the nerves of a strong man. I had obtained, through an accident, the possession of a ghastly secret, which first concerned Mrs. Joliffe and then her daughter. Both mother and daughter were victims. The girl was about to marry my greatest friend. I had given my word of honour not to betray the secret.

For long hours I paced up and down my room. What was I to do? Without being a doctor myself I found myself in the position of the family physician. It is an understood thing that a doctor does not betray his patients' secrets. On that point I entertained strong views. Here was a case which illustrated the theory. Without being a doctor I was in the position of one—I felt bound to be faithful to Mrs. Joliffe. Unless Maxwell found out Laura's terrible malady during the following day I could do nothing to enlighten him.

I went downstairs to breakfast, feeling ill at ease; afterwards I strolled away by myself. My one hope, and it was a miserable one, was that Laura would betray herself that day, and that Maxwell would be warned in time before he was united to a mad wife. To my distress, however, her mother's words with regard to the young girl turned out to be correct.

When she came to breakfast she looked calm and happy, her eyes met mine with serene unconsciousness. I managed to have a chat with her, and found to my added perplexity that she had forgotten every word she had spoken to me on the previous evening. She was devoted to her lover, and went about the grounds hanging on his arm. Mrs. Joliffe gave me one or two triumphant glances.

I could not join the rest of the happy party. I went away to the wood, and finding a secluded spot sat down to think out the situation. I must keep Mrs. Joliffe's secret, but at the same time I must take some means to rescue Maxwell from the appalling fate which hung over his head. Suddenly, as I thought, a memory returned to me. I seemed to hear my friend, Dr. Everzard, speaking.

"Brain disease," he said, "is often due to functional disturbance and consequent malnutrition of certain centres. If we can, therefore, ascertain where the brain is at fault, a rational line of treatment is pointed out."

I sprang to my feet.

"I have it," I cried aloud, excitedly.

Had there been time I would have gone to consult Dr. Everzard, but there was none. The wedding was to take place at two o'clock on the following day. I could not possibly reach Fairleigh Manor and return within the allotted time to Combe Ashley. But I might go to London and be back before the wedding. With Dr. Everzard's

remark in my mind, I thought carefully over the experiments which I had lately made with regard to animal extracts as a means of cure. If Everzard's idea were correct, there

was a certain portion of Laura Joliffe's brain which was not sufficiently nourished. The new line of treatment pointed out a definite cure for this. If I could supply the unhappy girl with those portions of brain which were faulty in her own, I

might gradually overcome the terrible malady which threatened her. In short, now was the time for me to test the experiments which I had so lavishly made in my little laboratory in Bloomsbury.

There was not a moment to lose, I hurried to the house.

Maxwell was smoking a cigar on the terrace in front of the house.

"Maxwell," I said, "will you order a trap immediately? I must catch the next train. I shall be back here by twelve to-night, if that is not too late."

"Not a bit," replied Maxwell; "I will sit up for you."

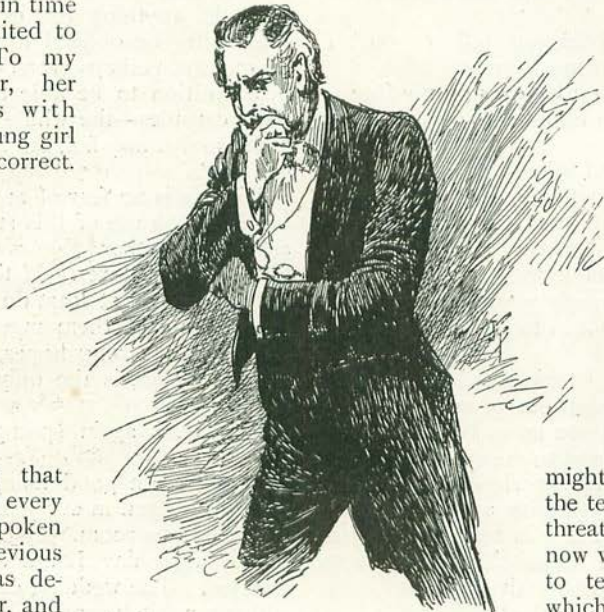
He hurried off to give directions, and in a very short time I found myself driving to the railway station.

I caught my train, and reached St. Pancras in good time. I drove straight home, entered my laboratory, secured a certain box of carefully prepared medicine, and took the next train back to Derbyshire. After twelve that night I was once more in my friend's house. Maxwell came to meet me.

"You look fagged," he said; "come and have some supper, it is waiting for you."

I went into the dining-room, made a hearty meal, and then asked Maxwell if the other guests had retired to bed.

"All except Mrs. Joliffe. For some reason she seems to be in a strangely nervous condition. She asked when you would



"FOR LONG HOURS I PACED UP AND DOWN MY ROOM."

return, and said she would like to speak to you."

"She is the very person I want to see," I answered. "Let me go to her at once."

"I suppose I must not know what the mystery is?"

"I am afraid I cannot tell it you," I answered, looking at him earnestly.

For answer he fixed his eyes on my face.

"I had a bad ten minutes to-day," he said. "Laura——"

"What of her?" I asked.

"Nay, I will not tell you, she is all right again now. You will find her mother in the library; do not let her keep you up long."

I went to Mrs. Joliffe with a sinking heart.

She started up eagerly when she saw me.

"What do you mean to do?" she asked, coming forward.

"This," I said. I took the box which I had brought from town out of my pocket.

"What does that box mean?" she asked.

"Sit down and listen to me quietly," I said.

"I have been making experiments, important experiments, with regard to a new cure. I need not waste time now in repeating to you exactly what I have done. Your part is to obey my directions implicitly."

"If I do not?" she asked.

"Then I shall consider myself absolved from my promise, and will tell Maxwell the entire truth."

"I will do anything you wish," she said.

She was trembling exceedingly. At this moment she was obliged to lean her hand against the nearest table to keep herself upright.

"The box which I have brought with me from town," I continued, "contains capsules. These capsules are made of gelatine, and each of them contains a certain dose. The medicine is of a new and important kind. In my opinion, and in that of Dr. Everzard, it acts in a direct manner upon the higher nervous centres. There is a strong possibility, Mrs. Joliffe—remember, I cannot speak with certainty—but there is a very strong possibility that within this little box lies the cure of your daughter's malady."

"God grant it," she said; her great eyes glistened through sudden tears.

"Your daughter must take three of these capsules daily," I continued. "You must get her to promise this. Give her one when she wakes in the morning, give her another before she leaves here with her husband. Wring a promise from her that she will never omit to take three daily."

"I will do so," she answered. "God

bless you, Mr. Gilchrist. Have you anything more to say?"

"Yes; Miss Joliffe must also furnish you with her address. There are enough capsules in that box to last her exactly a month. If they do anything for her, she will in all probability be obliged to continue the cure for months, perhaps years. I must be placed in a position to be able to supply her with more capsules—the whole thing is an experiment, and it may fail, but it is the very best I can do."

"There is no fear of any other evil resulting from the use of this strange medicine?" asked the mother.

"None whatever. If the capsules do no good, they will at least do no harm. I have taken many of them myself. Remember I have hopes, strong hopes, but no certainty. This, however, is the only thing that I can do."

The tears again sprang to Mrs. Joliffe's eyes.

"You are a good man," she said; "you shall be obeyed in every particular."

She left the room.

The next day Laura and Maxwell were married. The wedding ceremony took place without a hitch, and no bride ever looked more lovely.

I was standing in the hall when the bride and bridegroom went away. Maxwell had forgotten something, and had to hurry back to one of the sitting-rooms. For a moment the bride and I found ourselves alone. She came quickly to my side.

"I remember now all that I said to you the other night," she whispered. "Oh! Mr. Gilchrist, the awful fear is over me again—the terrible, maddening fear. From this out I shall be alone with him; I know he means to poison me—but if he does, remember that I—I have taken means to have my revenge."

She laughed as she spoke, that light, inconsequent, terrible laughter of the insane. Her lovely face also underwent a vivid change. For one flashing moment the angel went out of it, giving place to the fiend.

"Take your medicine three times a day without fail," I whispered back, "and try to believe that this unpleasant sensation will quickly pass."

"I have promised my mother to take those queer little pills," she replied.

"Repeat your promise to me; I am certain you are a woman of your word."

"I am, I never broke it yet. Here comes Lucian."

Her face altered, the fear seemed to die

out of it, the angel look returned. She sprang into the carriage, laughter on her lips, the light of happiness in her blue eyes.

What I suffered during the next few weeks it is difficult to describe. No news reached me with regard to Maxwell and his bride. Mrs. Joliffe, according to her determination,

"Read that portion," she said, pointing to the third page. I did so.

"I am glad to be able to tell you," wrote Maxwell, "that Laura, who was nervous and depressed, and was at times, I must add, very strange during the first fortnight of our honeymoon, has now quite recovered her normal spirits. She is really in excellent health, has a good appetite, and is putting on



"SHE SPRANG INTO THE CARRIAGE."

returned to Fairleigh Manor. My sleep was broken at night, my waking hours were haunted by the dread of a terrible catastrophe. Had I done right, had I done wrong? This question haunted me day and night. Would the capsules effect a cure, or would Maxwell find out when too late that I could have warned him against his awful fate and yet did not do so?

At last, on a certain fine morning, one month after the wedding, I could stand the mental strain no longer, and hurried off to Fairleigh Manor.

As soon as I got there I had an interview with Mrs. Joliffe. She came eagerly to meet me, her face was bright, her eyes full of happiness. She placed a letter in my hands. I saw at a glance that the writing was Maxwell's.

flesh. I doubt, when we return to England, if you will know her for the fragile girl who left her native land a short time ago. There is only one odd thing about her: she insists on dosing herself with some extraordinary little capsules three times daily. She is looking over me as I write, and begs me to say that the supply is nearly out, and she wants some more. She thinks they have a wonderful effect upon her, soothing her nerves in an inexplicable manner."

"I have brought a fresh box of medicine with me," I said. "Please send it to Mrs. Maxwell by the next post."

"Mr. Gilchrist," said Mrs. Joliffe, "I intend to try your medicine on myself. If it has effected a cure on my child, why not on me?"

"Why not, truly?" I answered.