

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.

III.—LADY TREGENNA.



FEW years ago a total eclipse of the sun was expected to be visible in Ceylon and Southern India. Having never seen the great world of light under these interesting conditions, I arranged to join a party of solar spectroscopists, who were about to start for India. We arrived at our destination in good time, and had the satisfaction of witnessing a total eclipse of nearly six minutes' duration. The phenomenon of the corona, or ring of light, was especially striking, as also were the irregular, red-coloured protuberances round the direct body of the moon.

We made our observations in the hill country, and immediately afterwards started for the coast. The man who took the lead in all our investigations bore the name of Sir John Tregenna. He was without doubt the most enthusiastic of the party. He was tall, dark, and wiry in appearance, a noted astronomer, and the envy of his fellow-travellers, owing to the fact that he possessed one of the finest telescopes in his part of the country. But, keen specialist that he was, outside his own science he seemed to take little or no interest in anything. His history, as far as I could make it out, was commonplace. He was a man of good family, being, indeed, a baronet of long descent. He owned a large property on the sea coast in Cornwall bearing the name of Tregenna Manor. Sir John had been married for several years, but had no children. This fact might possibly account for the gloom which sat at longer or shorter intervals on his fine face, for it was an open secret that the splendid property of Tregenna Manor was strictly entailed, and would go to a distant branch of the family if Sir John died without issue.

On a certain intensely hot night, as he and I were standing together on the veranda just outside one of the big hotels at Madras, he wiped the moisture from his brow, turned round, saw that we were alone, and, crossing his arms, looked full at me.

"You are a bit of a doctor, are you not, Gilchrist?" he said.

"I have studied medicine and surgery," I answered.

"So I have just been informed. Well, the fact is—I am anxious about my wife."

"Lady Tregenna?—I hope she is well," I answered.

"I hope so, too," he replied, with a grim smile; "but"—he paused, then brought out the following words with a burst which revealed irrepressible agitation—"when I left England there was a hope that she might present me with an heir to the property. We have been married for over ten years. It was imperative that I should accompany this expedition, or I should not have left her at such a critical time. I expected news before now. It was arranged that my doctor was to cable to me here"—he broke off abruptly.

"The silence makes me uneasy," he said, after a pause. "I am glad that I am soon returning home."

He had scarcely said the words before a servant appeared, bearing two cablegrams on a salver. One was addressed to Sir John Tregenna, the other to myself. I noticed that he changed colour as he took his from the salver. Out of consideration for him I left the veranda and entered the heated room where we had just dined. I opened my own cablegram. It was somewhat long, containing a good deal of valuable information in cipher. It was from a doctor friend in town with whom I largely corresponded, and whose discoveries as regarded medicine coincided very closely with some I had made myself. The final news in the cablegram startled and distressed me:—

"Your fellow-traveller, Sir John Tregenna, is disappointed of his hope of an heir. Lady Tregenna gave birth to a boy this morning, who only lived one hour."

I made an ejaculation under my breath. Sir John's eager face, the look in his eyes when he spoke of an heir to his property, flashed painfully now before my mental vision. The blow he was about to receive was a cruel one.

I had just thrust the cablegram into my pocket when a grip of almost iron intensity on my arm caused me to turn abruptly. Sir John had entered the room, his hair was standing up wildly over his head, his eyes looked as if they would burst their sockets. Doubtless his own communication had acquainted him with the disaster. I was about to make use of some ordinary words

of commiseration when I was startled by the following sentences from the Baronet's lips.

"Gilchrist," he gasped, "I can scarcely contain myself, the relief is so immense. I am the father of a fine boy. The property is saved."



"I AM THE FATHER OF A FINE BOY."

He dragged me out on to the veranda, and stood there mopping himself and breathing hard.

"This is a relief," he muttered, at intervals.

I did not dare to tell him the news I had just received. His excitement was so great that to dash it to the ground now might almost kill him.

"You do not realize what this means to me," he said, presently, slipping his hand through my arm and pacing up and down. "If I have an enemy in the world, it is the man who was to have succeeded me at the Manor. His name is Dayrell Tregenna. How that wretch has hankered and longed for my death; but, ha! ha! the little fellow will put matters right now. Dayrell won't dare show his nose within twenty miles of the Manor from this day out. He, and his cursed brood with him, can go to the Antipodes for all I care. The child makes all right. So Lady Tregenna is a mother at last. Well, I am a happy man to-night."

He would scarcely allow me to speak. Like most very reserved people, when he gave voice to his emotions he said far more than he intended. It was late when we both retired to rest.

"I shall take passage home to-morrow," were his last words to me; "I cannot rest until I see the kid. To think that I have a lad of my own after these long years of waiting, and that Dayrell is ousted. The thought

of Dayrell gives the highest flavour to my joy. Wish me luck, Gilchrist."

"I certainly do," I answered.

"And prosperity to the boy and a long life, eh?"

"Yes," I replied, again. But the thought of the news which lay in my own breast pocket caused the words to stick in my throat.

"You look stunned, man," said Sir John. "It is plain to be seen that you are not married, or you would not express yourself so lamely."

"I am neither married, nor have I lands to leave to my descendants," I replied; "but I heartily wish you luck, Sir John."

"When you come to England you must visit me at the Manor and see the child for yourself," were his last words. "Now, don't forget; I know your address in town, and will write to you. To tell you the truth, Gilchrist, you are the only man of our party in whom I feel a particle of interest. You shall come to the Manor and be introduced to the boy."

There was not a word about Lady Tregenna. I went wondering to my bedroom.

The next day Sir John sailed for England, and soon afterwards, one by one, the little band of scientific men who had gathered together to witness the eclipse departed on their several ways.

It so happened that I did not leave India for several months, and during that time was concerned to learn that my special friend, Dr. Collett, the man who had sent me the cipher, had died suddenly. His death had taken place on the very day on which the cipher was forwarded to me by cablegram. We had been old chums for years, and had been associated in more than one investigation of interest. I mourned his loss considerably, and when I did return to England the following summer, thought with sadness of the empty place which he could no longer fill, and of the active, kindly, and busy brain now for ever at rest.

Amongst the pile of letters which waited for me in my flat in Bloomsbury, I saw one in the somewhat eccentric handwriting of Sir John Tregenna. I opened it.

"Poor fellow," I reflected; "he must have discovered his loss by this time. God help him! I never saw anyone in such a state of undue excitement as he was in during that last evening we spent together at Madras."

"Dear Gilchrist," the letter ran—"I am given to understand that you will be back in the Metropolis some time in June. I hope as soon as ever you do arrive, and have read the contents of this, you will pack up your portmanteau and come straight down to Tregenna Manor. I want to show you the boy. He is as fine a lad as the heart of father could desire. Dayrell is still in the country, and sometimes visits at the Manor, but with my fine young heir to look at, I no longer mind him. In short, I breathe freely.

"Yours, JOHN TREGENNA."

After reading this letter I felt a curious desire to glance once again at the cablegram which Collett had sent me, and which, amongst other items of intelligence, had informed me that Lady Tregenna had given birth to a boy, who had died after an hour of life. I had been careful not to destroy this cablegram. I took it now from the box where it lay, and read it over carefully once more. There was no doubt whatever of the meaning of the words. Had Collett been alive, I would certainly have gone to his house in Harley Street to talk the matter over with him; but as it was now impossible to get a solution from that quarter, I could only wait for the mystery to unravel itself. After thinking a moment I decided to accept Sir John's invitation, and wrote an acceptance that very day. Shortly afterwards I packed my belongings and started for Cornwall.

Sir John himself met me at the station. All his taciturnity and gloom had left him—he was now a talkative and particularly cheerful man.

"Here you are," he cried, stretching out his great hand and wringing mine.

"And how is the boy?" I asked.

"Splendid—grand little chap. Has not had an hour's illness since his birth."

"And Lady Tregenna?"

"As fit as paint—what should ail her? You will see her for yourself in a moment or two. Now then, we will just pull up here—you catch the first glimpse of the house from here. It is the kind of place that a man would like to hand down to his son, eh? Did you speak, Gilchrist?"

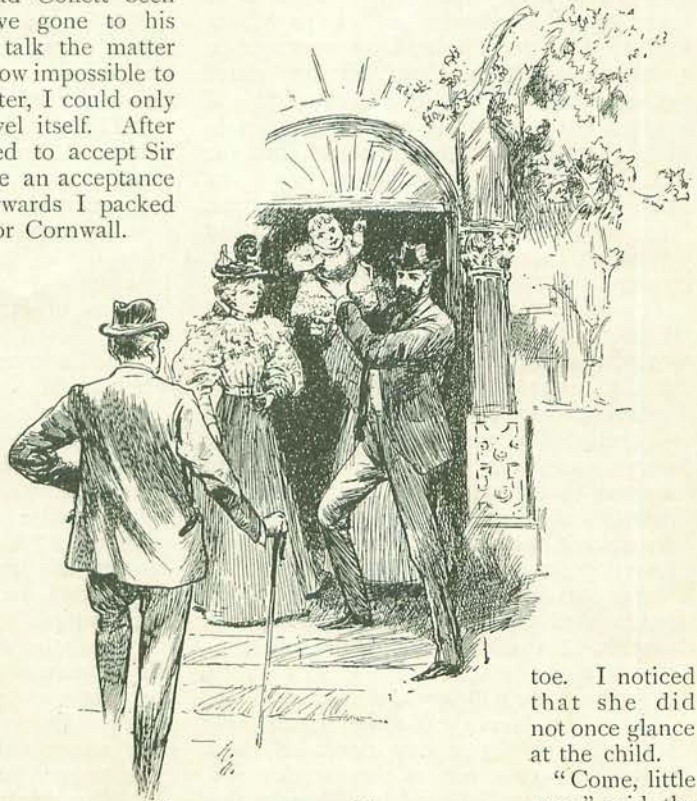
"I did not," I replied. "I see that you have got a very beautiful place, Sir John."

"It has been in the family for generations. Now, come, I will introduce you to the wife and kid in a moment. Bless the boy, he is a fine chap, that he is."

The Baronet whipped up his horses, and a moment or two later we drew up in front of the fine old mansion. Lady Tregenna was standing on the steps—a nurse, dressed from head to foot in white, stood a little behind her, holding a baby in her arms.

"Well, Kate, here we are," called out her husband; "bring the boy down, won't you? This is Gilchrist. Let me introduce you: Lady Tregenna—Mr. Gilchrist. Now, then, wife, bring the boy along. Eh, Gilchrist, what do you think of him, eh?"

While her husband spoke, I noticed that Lady Tregenna slightly blushed. Her complexion was pale, and the blush became her—her eyes grew very bright. She fixed them neither on me nor on the child, but with great intentness on her husband. She seemed to look him all over from top to



"A GOOD SPECIMEN, EH?"

toe. I noticed that she did not once glance at the child.

"Come, little man," said the father; "come

to your dad. Here he is, Gilchrist, not more than six months old—a good specimen, eh?"

"A very fine boy," I answered, glancing at him hastily.

When I said this Lady Tregenna moved a few paces away. Having done so, she turned slowly.

"Perhaps, John," she said, "Mr. Gilchrist is not so much interested in children as we are; that is natural, is it not? Shall I show you the gardens, Mr. Gilchrist, or would you rather go straight into the house before tea?"

"I will accompany you," I replied. "But you are mistaken," I added, "in supposing that I am not interested in this boy. I happened to be in the same hotel at Madras with your husband when he received the cablegram announcing his birth."

"Aye, that was a red-letter night for me," said the Baronet. He glanced affectionately at his wife as he spoke. The moment he did so her whole face altered: it became suddenly very beautiful; she had deep, very dark violet eyes, and they lit up now as if a torch had illuminated them from within, her lips parted in a slow, happy smile. She raised one of her slender hands to push back the hair from her forehead. I noticed then a curious expression about her face which denoted not only beauty but strength. I saw at a glance that she had in many ways more character than her husband, but she was also a woman who looked as if on occasions she might do something desperate. I felt much interested in her. She again approached her husband's side and put out her hand to touch one of the boy's.

For the first time I surveyed the infant critically. He was a well-grown boy, with somewhat large features, but I could not detect the slightest likeness to either parent. The mother was very fair, but the father had a swarthy skin, with dark eyes, aquiline features, and black hair. The baby neither possessed the beauty of the mother nor the distinction of the father. He was an ordinary-looking child, hundreds like him to be found all over the length and breadth of England.

"You are doubtless thinking," said Lady Tregenna, who seemed to be reading my thoughts, "that the boy is not like either his father or me?"

"I cannot see a likeness," I replied.

"Bless him," said the Baronet, "he is only six months old; you can never tell how children will turn out at that tender age. Now, for my part, I have often thought that he had a look of you, madam"—he nodded, smiling, at his wife as he spoke—"about the lips for instance. He has an uncommonly pretty mouth, bless the little lad."

"He is not really like me, John," she answered, "nor is he like you."

"Well, well," said Sir John, impatiently, "he is a fine boy, and quite after my own heart. But, here, I must really take up no more of Gilchrist's time drivelling over the infant. Nurse, take him, will you? See you give him plenty of air; it is a splendid day, and the more he is out in the sunshine the better."

The nurse, a grave, middle-aged woman, with a dark face and thin, compressed lips, came slowly forward, took the boy in her arms, and vanished with him round a corner of the house.

"We are going to have tea on the lawn," said Lady Tregenna, turning to me. "May I show you the way?"

"All right, wife, you look after him," said Tregenna. "I must go to the stables, but will join you presently."

Lady Tregenna conducted me under a thick arch of roses on to a small lawn, where she seated herself by a little tea-table. She motioned me to a seat near her.

"It is strange," she said, after a long pause, "that you should have been with my husband when he received the message that he was the father of a boy."

"There is something else stranger," I continued, impelled, I can scarcely tell by what, to force my information upon her. "I also received a cablegram the same night from my very old friend, Dr. Collett."

"Collett?" she said. "Dr. Collett of London?"

"Yes, of Harley Street. Did you know him?"

"He happened to attend me when my boy was born."

She did not change colour in any way, but I noticed that she toyed with her teaspoon, and dropped three lumps of sugar into the cup of tea which she was about to drink.

"My cablegram was a curious one," I continued; "it was in cipher, of course. It gave me false information with regard to you. Collett told me that your baby died shortly after its birth."

"My baby died—little John died?" said the mother, half rising from her seat, and then sitting down again. She stared full at me. There was no added flush on her cheeks, nor did her large, violet eyes look more than slightly startled.

"What a strange mistake to make," she said, with a light laugh.

"It was."

"Absolutely without foundation," she continued. "But, then, Dr. Collett died on the

day of my baby's birth. He may not have quite known what he was telegraphing to you about."

"I had scarcely read his words," I continued, "before your husband appeared, in a great state of excitement, to inform me that all was well and that you were the mother of a fine boy. Undoubtedly, the boy is a fine little chap. I congratulate you heartily."



"MY CABLEGRAM WAS A CURIOUS ONE."

At that moment Sir John's voice was heard in the distance. Lady Tregenna stood up eagerly. She had taken my news almost too calmly, but now there was unmistakable agitation in her voice, look, and manner.

"Not a word to him," she said, in a whisper. "I would not let him know for the world, he would think it unlucky. You will promise?"

"As I did not tell your husband at the time, I should have no possible reason for repeating the news now," I said. "His affection for the child is quite touching."

"He has the best of reasons for loving him," she answered. She left me, walking slowly across the grass.

That evening Tregenna took me into his study, and we spent a short time examining the valuable photographs he had taken in India of the sun's eclipse. Just before we parted for the night he stood up, looked me full in the face, and spoke.

"So you think the boy a fine little chap, eh?" he said.

"Undoubtedly," I replied, with a smile.

"And Lady Tregenna—she seems pleased to be the mother of the little fellow, eh?—that strikes you, eh?"

"You are wrapped up in him," I said, evasively, for I had noticed from the first that Lady Tregenna scarcely ever mentioned the child, and as far as I could tell appeared to take no special interest in him.

Tregenna's face became crimson.

"I see you observe what I have noticed myself," he exclaimed. "The fact is, there is no accounting for women. I thought she would have been wild about the lad; but, as a matter of fact, never did a woman take a child more calmly. Not

that she neglects him—far from that. She sees that he is well looked after, and has him brought to her once or twice daily; but she never pets him—it is a fact, Gilchrist, that I have never seen her once kiss him of her own accord. Bless me, Gilchrist, I don't understand women. It is not even as if Lady Tregenna were a cold, phlegmatic sort of woman; she is all passion, fire, enthusiasm; but where that child is concerned——" he put up his handkerchief to wipe the drops from his forehead as he spoke; his eyes were full of a queer apprehension.

"People have different ways of showing their affection," I replied.

He took no notice of my speech.

"I sometimes think I bore her by the delight which the fact of possessing that child gives me," he continued; "but, there, I am keeping you up, and you must be desperately tired."

He conducted me to my room, bade me good-night, and left me. I went to the window and flung it wide open. There was no moon, but innumerable stars studded the dark blue of the heavens. I extinguished the lights in the chamber, put my head out of the window, and looked around me. A

fresh breeze blew upon my face, and my sleepiness vanished instantly. I felt a sudden longing to steal downstairs and go out for a long ramble. No sooner did the notion come to me than I acted upon it. The house was already shut up, but I managed to make my way to a side door, which I unbarred and let myself out.

I wandered down the broad central avenue, intending to branch off in the direction of the sea. I was walking on the grass, and not making the slightest noise, when voices startled me. They seemed to be quite close. I stepped back into a deep shadow. The first words I heard were in Lady Tregenna's high-bred tones.

"I cannot go on with this much longer, Dayrell," she cried. "I cannot possibly give you what you require, for I have not got it. You have drained all my resources. Here, if you will have it, take this ring, it is of great value. If he misses it from my finger I can but tell him another lie."

I saw her give something to a man who stood near, then she turned abruptly and walked back to the house, stumbling and half falling as she walked. As soon as she had left him, the man took a pipe from his pocket and a box of matches. He calmly lit the pipe, and then by the light of another match examined the ring which she had just given him. I could see the diamonds flash for a moment in the light caused by the match, then there was complete darkness. He slipped the ring into his breast-pocket and turned to leave the grounds.

I waited quietly until he had gone some distance, and then made up my mind to follow him. He reached a stile which he mounted and which led direct into the high road. Still keeping my

distance, I did likewise. He walked in the direction of the village, which was within a stone's throw of the sea. Presently, in the extreme quiet of the night, he stopped still, as if he were listening. The belated moon arose at that moment, and turning abruptly, the man saw me following him. He stopped and waited for me to come up.

"You are out late," he said, as I passed.

I made a brief rejoinder, as, although I wanted to get a glimpse of him, I had no desire to enter into conversation. He seemed to guess my intention, for he stepped immediately into the middle of the path.

"By Jove!" he cried, "I know who you are. Your name is Gilchrist—you are a special chum of the governor's; you came to the Manor to-day."

I glanced at him: his features were dark and aquiline—in that particular not unlike Sir John Tregenna's, but they were much bloated, as if by constant dissipation. I could imagine that the fellow drank like a fish. His clothes were seedy and vulgar in style—his lips thin and cruel, his eyes too closely set together.

"Good old boy, Sir John," he said, after a pause; "if you don't wish to make the

most confounded mischief, you will keep this interview dark as far as your host is concerned."

I was silent. The man continued to fix me with his evil eyes.

"I speak for Lady Tregenna's sake," he said again, after a very significant pause. "She will find herself in a nice scrape if anything happens to make me turn up rough. I don't think I need add any more. Good-night to you."

He vanished down a side-path, and I slowly returned to the Manor. Nothing happened of any importance during the remainder of



"I COULD SEE THE DIAMONDS FLASH."

my visit, nor did I see Dayrell Tregenna again. I returned to London after a week's visit, and being much occupied, had little time to devote to the mysterious subject of Lady Tregenna and the heir. A year passed away, when one day I received a letter from her. It was worded as follows:—

"Dear Mr. Gilchrist, I am most anxious to see you. Sir John is in Scotland at present, but I have several friends staying in the house, and if you can make it possible to come to the Manor for a couple of nights, I can promise that you will not have a lonely time. Come if you possibly can.

"Yours sincerely, KATE TREGENNA."

In reply to this letter I sent off a telegram.

"Expect me to-morrow," I wired.

The next day at an early hour I started for Cornwall, and arrived at the Manor in the evening.

Lady Tregenna was in the garden, a very small child was toddling by her side; he was clinging on to one of her fingers, and looking up now and then into her face. The moment she saw me she placed him sitting on the grass and came forward quickly.

"It is good of you to come," she said. As she spoke she made an effort to smile. I could scarcely refrain from uttering an exclamation, so shocked was I at the change in her appearance. There were heavy shadows under her eyes, the eyes were now much too big for the face, the face was worn to emaciation. When I touched the hand which she offered me it burned as though its owner was consumed by inward fever.

"It is good of you to come," she repeated; "if my husband were here he would thank you."

"I am pleased to be of the slightest service to you," I replied. "Is that the little fellow? How much he has grown!"

"He is a very strong boy," she answered—she turned her head somewhat wearily in the direction of the lad, and then looked away again.

The child came toddling towards her,

stretching out both his arms. She did not offer to lift him up, but again extended one of her fingers, which he clasped.

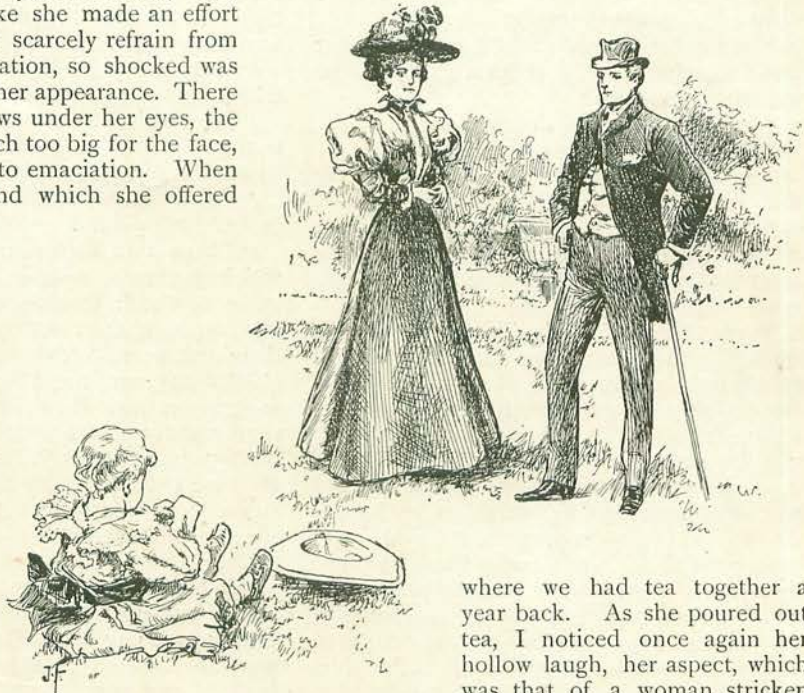
At this moment the same nurse whom I had seen a year ago came into view. Her face also had undergone a remarkable change for the worse. It was always a hard face, dark, with compressed lips, but now it was much lined and looked too old for her evident years—she glanced uneasily first at her mistress, then at me, and finally at the boy. When she looked at the boy I saw a peculiar expression pass like a flash over her features. She bent down, caught the child in her arms, kissed him with a passion which I had never seen the mother evince, and carried him away.

"He really is a very fine little chap," I said. "His father must be proud of him."

"Sir John is wrapped up in him, Mr. Gilchrist," replied Lady Tregenna; "but, come, I have plenty to say to you on that head in a moment or two. First let me offer you a cup of tea."

"Thank you," I answered.

She led me on to the same small lawn



"HOW MUCH HE HAS GROWN!"

where we had tea together a year back. As she poured out tea, I noticed once again her hollow laugh, her aspect, which was that of a woman stricken with deadly illness.

"Forgive me," I said, suddenly, "you are very unwell?"

"I am—sometimes I think I am dying," she answered. She pressed her hand to her

heart. "The burden is too heavy," she continued, "I must share it with someone—you have come in answer to my summons; I mean to confide in you. Will you follow me now to my morning-room; we shall be safe from interruption there?"

She rose as she spoke, and walked across the lawn. I followed. We entered a beautifully decorated little room off one of the big drawing-rooms. She seated herself in a low chair, and asked me to find a place near.

"Rest assured," I said, as I did so, "that my services are at your disposal."

"Before I take you into my full confidence," said Lady Tregenna, "I have a request to make."

"Ask anything," I answered.

"I want you to promise that you will not divulge what I am about to tell you until I give you permission."

I thought for a moment, then I said, slowly: "I will respect your secret."

"Thank you." She raised her eyes and looked full at me. "You know a part of my trouble," she continued, "you shall now hear the whole."

"I know a part of your trouble?" I said. "I don't quite understand."

"You will in a moment. Do you remember the cablegram which your friend, Dr. Collett, sent you to Madras?"

"Of course," I replied, gravely.

"Mr. Gilchrist, it was true."

"True?" I answered, springing to my feet.

"Yes, quite true. Now, sit down and let me tell you everything quietly. I must tell my story in my own way, and I must begin at the beginning."

I sat down as Lady Tregenna had requested. She clasped her hands in her lap; two bright spots appeared on either cheek. She looked even more ill than she had done a moment ago.

"We were married ten years," she began, in a low, monotonous voice. "We came to the conclusion that we should never have a child. Sir John became more and more discontented. He had hours when a strange excitement seized him, more particularly when he was tortured by the presence of the cousin, whom he so cordially detests, Dayrell Tregenna. My husband loathed him for his want of tact, and his constant reference to the time when the place should be his.

"At last, over two years ago, I found, to my inexpressible joy, that I was about to become a mother. My husband's raptures

were beyond words. He meant to stay with me, but the expedition during which you first made his acquaintance had been already arranged—he was the principal member of the party, and found it impossible to resign his post. He had to leave me, to his own inexpressible anxiety. When he went away he was a happy man and I was a happy woman—buoyed up by the sweetest hope. Afterwards—"

"Tell me everything," I said, gently.

She pressed her hand to her forehead and continued:—

"The child was born in London. I was very ill at its birth, and for some time afterwards was unconscious. When I came to my senses all was quiet in the sick room. The nurse whom I had engaged was standing by the bed-side—she held a beautifully-dressed baby in her arms. I remembered then what had happened and raised my head. A rush of joy ran through my heart.

"Show me the child," I said. 'Is it a boy?'

"Yes, madam, it is a boy,' she replied; she bent down as she spoke and showed me the little fellow—then at a sign from me she laid it by my side. I kissed it, and was happy as mother could be.

"Has Sir John been cabled to yet?' I asked.

"She replied to this that Mr. Dayrell was in the house, and only waited for my authority to send a cablegram immediately.

"Tell him to do so without an instant's delay,' I answered.

"There was something in her manner which made me wonder even then. It was grave, anxious: she looked as if a load had been suddenly put upon her; but I was so delighted, so full of bliss at having a living child of my own, that I had no more thoughts to spare for her. I spent the greater part of that night with the child in my arms. I made a quick recovery, but was astonished to see that Dr. Collett no longer attended me. Another very excellent physician came to see me, however, and I did not suspect the truth.

"When the boy was about a fortnight old, and I was up again on the sofa, the nurse came to me one day and confessed what had really happened. A few moments after the birth of my baby Dr. Collett had become seriously unwell—he had been obliged to hurry away, leaving the case with the nurse. When he left the house the baby had shown signs of weakness and want of proper circulation—he thought its life might be saved,

however, and intended to return again within half an hour. As a matter of fact, ten minutes after Dr. Collett left the house the child died. The nurse sent a hasty message to the doctor telling him that the child was dead. Two hours after doing so she was startled by getting a message herself from the great physician's house to say that he had died suddenly, and that another doctor must take up the case.

"Dayrell, who had spent the entire day in the house, was pacing up and down in the drawing-room when she ran in to tell him what had occurred.

"This will kill Sir John Tregenna," he said.

"And Lady Tregenna, for that matter," replied the woman; "they built so much on the child."

"He looked at her for a long time, she said then, and did not speak. Then he came up to her side and began to whisper a plan which he said had suddenly darted through his mind.

"You are not well off?" he began.

"She owned that she was not; also, that she had a child of her own, a lame child, who depended altogether on her exertions to support it.

"You shall stay on here, at a high salary, as the child's nurse," he said.

"The child's nurse, Mr. Dayrell? You forget that the child is dead," she answered.

"He held up his hand to stop her.

"And I will give you five hundred pounds in addition if you help me," he continued.

"He then proposed to her to conceal the fact of the child's death from me for the present, but to cable to Sir John that he was the father of a fine boy, and to substitute a living child in the dead baby's place. He knew, he said, where he could easily find a baby. The fact of Dr. Collett's death would make the certificate of birth wonderfully simple. He would undertake that the dead child should be disposed of without remark.

"This scheme was carried into effect by

the pair; and when I was made acquainted with the fact, I had been lavishing my affection on the baby of a strange woman for over a fortnight. What my feelings were when this revelation was made to me I cannot attempt to describe. I was speechless. The child of another woman lay on my knee. It was with difficulty that I could

even bring myself to look at it. As I paused and considered, my heart beating hard, my emotions almost suffocating me, the nurse's eyes fixed with the keenest anxiety on my face, there came a knock at the door and Dayrell entered.

"I know everything," he said. "Now, Lady Tregenna, you won't be a fool; you want an heir—your husband wants an heir. If he believes you to

be the mother of his child, he will love you as he has never loved you yet. The heir lies on your lap"—he pointed to the baby as he spoke—"and," he added, in a significant manner, "my silence can be bought."

"I was too weak to resist him and the nurse; in short, I yielded to the nefarious scheme. From that hour my misery began. Dayrell has blackmailed me to a frightful extent. I have sold all my jewels to satisfy his demands. I have parted with the large allowance which Sir John gives me. I have further asked my husband for large sums of money; he is a wealthy man, and up to the present suspects nothing. I have even gone to the length of borrowing largely (at this moment I am heavily in debt), and all to quiet that monster who feeds himself upon my wretchedness. The nurse and the man know the truth. They promise secrecy only so long as I can supply their inordinate desire for money. The woman gets a hundred a year, in addition to heavy bribes. I have paid Dayrell thousands of pounds since the birth of the child. As to Sir John, he suspects nothing. He is wrapped up in the child, and of late it is with difficulty I can get him to return to his old interests in



"THE CHILD OF ANOTHER WOMAN LAY ON MY KNEE."

scientific pursuits. I never saw anything like his passion for the baby. He can scarcely talk of anything else. Several times a day he visits him in his nursery, he takes him about the grounds on his shoulders—the child and the man are inseparable. I believe if he knew the truth now, that his reason would fail him. Insanity, at rare intervals, has been known in his family, and he is very excitable. Dayrell's presence at such a moment might lead to terrible results.

"On the day my husband went rather unexpectedly to Scotland, that wretch came to me and demanded two thousand pounds. He said he required the money for a special emergency, and if I did not give it to him, would write a letter to Sir John telling him the whole story, and would abscond himself. I could only raise that sum by selling the family diamonds, which my husband would immediately miss. Mr. Gilchrist, was there ever a woman in such a terrible position as I am in?"

"You must on no account give that man any more money," I said, after a pause. "I confess I cannot see, at this moment, how to save you without communicating the truth to Sir John, but I should like to think over matters. This blackmailing must be stopped at any cost. On the face of it, it seems to me a queer thing that Dayrell Tregenna should wish to substitute a living child for your dead one, when he himself is the next heir to the property."

"Yes, but he and my husband are very much the same age, and my husband's is in reality a better life than his. Then he is penniless, or nearly so—he has married beneath him and has a large family. At intervals he has dreadful bouts of drinking—in fact, he is a bad fellow all round."

"You think, then, that he concocted the scheme for the sole purpose of making money?"

"I am certain of it. But his last demand is the most outrageous he has yet made. The fact is this, I can stand the strain no longer; I am getting seriously ill—my resources are at an end. And yet I am certain that if my husband discovers the truth he will turn me out of his house! Oh, my wretched life! I often long to commit suicide in order to end everything."

"You must have patience, and allow me if possible to act for you now," I said. "It has been my privilege to get people out of scrapes nearly as bad as yours before now. I am glad you have had courage to tell me

the exact truth—I will think things over carefully, and will have a talk with you to-morrow."

That night, to my astonishment and disgust, Dayrell Tregenna was one of the guests at dinner. He showed in his most objectionable form, put on airs as though he was master of the establishment, and I could see disgusted more than one of the guests. Lady Tregenna never noticed him by word or deed. The whole party retired early to bed, and I spent an anxious and wakeful night.

The next morning I rose at an early hour, but when I went downstairs I was still completely in the dark as to how to act. As I entered the stately old hall I was much astonished to see standing on the threshold, looking exactly as if he had never left home, the well-known figure of Sir John Tregenna. He heard my step, for he turned eagerly.

"Gilchrist, of all people!" he cried. "Well, how are you? I am right glad to see you. Yes, I have returned unexpectedly; the wife does not know yet that I am in the house, but I have just sent a message to the nurse to bring the boy down. By the way, what do you think of my heir now, eh?"

"He has made fine progress," I answered; "he walks all alone—he seems a well-grown little chap."

At that moment the nurse appeared at the end of a long corridor, the boy toddling by her side. The moment the child saw his supposed father he uttered a shriek of delight and ran forward. The Baronet forgot all about me and hurried to meet him. He came back again after a moment, his own face crimson, his eyes shining, the boy elevated on his shoulder. It was just then that I noticed something; something which I had completely failed to observe when I had seen the baby a year ago. The child now bore an unmistakable and very striking likeness to the Tregennas—the eyes were in expression, although not in colour, the exact counterpart of the eager eyes of the man who was looking up at him with such pride and delight—the mouth also bore a likeness to Lady Tregenna—but the boy's eyes and smile, and the sturdy way he held his head on his broad shoulders, were an exact *replica* of Sir John.

The moment I made this discovery there flashed through my mind a possible solution of the mystery. Sir John was so absorbed in talking to the boy, in kissing him, and examining his sturdy limbs, that he did not notice anything I did or said. I went quickly in the direction where the nurse was standing.

"I am anxious to have a word with you," I said.

She looked at me—a queer expression came into her dark eyes; her mouth closed firmly.

"I should like to speak to you now," I continued.

"Certainly, sir," she answered, in a submissive voice.

"Alone," I continued.

"Yes, sir," she said, again. She turned slowly, walked down the corridor, and opened a side door which led into a shrubbery.

"No one will disturb us here, sir," she said. "Will you please say what you have come to say quickly, as I am anxious to go to attend on my mistress."

"I want to ask you a straight question," I said. "I had an interview with Lady Tregenna yesterday, in which she told me what she believes to be the true history of the child. What is your name, nurse?"

"Mrs. Hodgkins, sir."

"Well, Mrs. Hodgkins," I continued, "I have my own private reasons for believing that Lady Tregenna's version is not the correct one."

"Good heavens, Mr. Gilchrist, what can you mean?"

The woman had great control over herself, but in spite of all her efforts her face turned a queer colour.

"The whole story is very strange and inexplicable," I continued. "Under ordinary circumstances, it would be my duty to tell it to Sir John Tregenna, and to ask him to bring a detective down from London to find out full particulars. For instance, before believing the version which you and Mr. Tregenna palmed off upon Lady Tregenna, there are some questions to be answered. Where was the real baby to whom Lady Tregenna gave birth buried? Where did you find the child who has been adopted in its place? Speak at once, and tell me the truth."

"Now, what is all this about?" said another voice in our ears.

I turned quickly, and to my annoyance saw Dayrell standing before me. He looked more bloated and more disreputable than ever.

"I thought, Gilchrist, you were up to mischief, by the expression on your face last night," he said, "so, all things considered, I resolved to get up early and have a chat with you before breakfast. I find you in conversation with Mrs. Hodgkins. What does it mean?"

"I am talking with Mrs. Hodgkins over a private matter, and I should be glad if you would leave us," I answered.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," he replied. He placed his feet far apart and crossed his arms.

"You can remain or not, as you please," I continued. "After all, what I have got to say may interest you as well as this woman. Sir John Tregenna has just returned, and is at present with his supposed heir."

The man's face assumed an ugly look.

"Sir John back so soon?" he said. "I did not think he was expected for another week."

"He is here—I have just spoken to him."

"And what do you mean by making use of the expression 'his supposed heir'?" continued Dayrell.

"Because, Mr. Tregenna, Lady Tregenna has told me everything from her point of view. Now listen, both of you. It is my firm conviction that she has been deceived. If I do not get at the truth at once I shall—"

Dayrell interrupted me with a laugh.

"So you are trying that little game on," he said; "very clever of you, no doubt, but you won't get anything out of me, try as you may."

"I will tell you all you desire to know, sir," said the nurse, suddenly.

At these unexpected words Dayrell's countenance changed. He turned and faced her. He gave the woman a look under which she quailed for a moment, but presently she drew herself up and spoke with defiance.

"I am not going to be afraid of you, Mr.

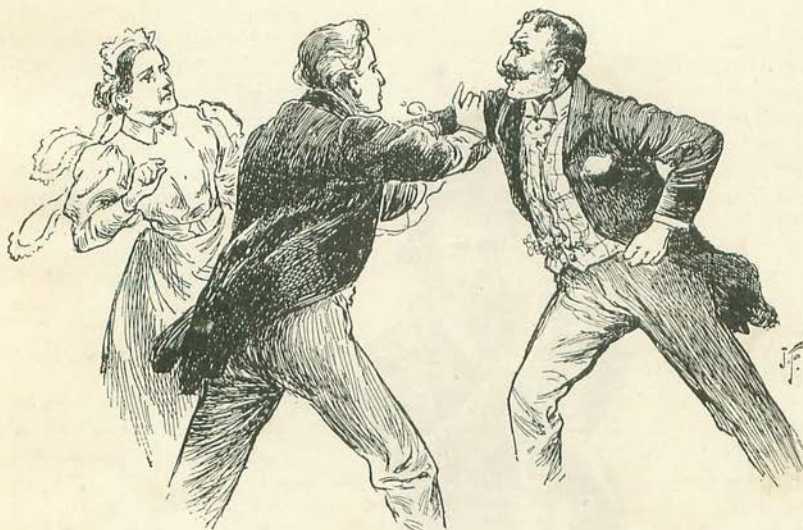


"HE CAME BACK WITH THE BOY
ELEVATED ON HIS SHOULDER."

Dayrell," she said. "The fact is, I cannot bear this thing any longer. Yes, sir," she continued, turning to me, "it was all his doing. I am glad you have spoken to me, sir. I am glad to be able to relieve my conscience. I see the thing is killing Lady Tregenna, and the misery I have endured since the child's birth no words can tell. Sir, I will tell you everything now."

Dayrell made a step forward as if he meant to strike her.

"Stand back," I said, getting between him



"STAND BACK!"

and the nurse. "Now speak, and quickly," I continued.

"Well, Mr. Gilchrist, it was in this way. I am a widow with one child, and have had hard work to earn my livelihood. When I came to nurse Lady Tregenna, I happened to meet Mr. Dayrell once or twice before the birth of the child. He spoke to me, and expressed his disgust at the possibility of an heir being born. The child came into the world, and fine baby that he was, for a short time there were doubts entertained of his life. Dr. Collett, as you know, had to leave the house shortly after the birth, owing to the illness which so unexpectedly carried him off. Almost immediately after his departure Mr. Dayrell came to me and asked how the child was. I told him he was in a bad case, but I thought he would revive—I then hurried back to attend to him. In an hour after the birth the child was breathing freely, and all danger had passed. I saw that he would live and do well. I was engaged

attending him and his mother, when there came another knock at the door—I opened it, and that villain stood without. He called me into the passage, and there offered me the temptation to which I yielded. He would pay me five hundred pounds down if I would act on his suggestion, and send a message to Dr. Collett that the child had died. I believe his first idea was to send the living child away and substitute a dead baby in his place, which he was confident he could procure. I was frightened and miserable. I wanted

the money badly, and before I knew what I was doing, consented to his horrible suggestion. I sent a message to the doctor to say that the child was dead. Almost immediately afterwards a telegram came from his house to inform me that Dr. Collett had died suddenly himself, and that another physician would be sent in to attend on Lady Tregenna. It was immediately after hearing this piece

of news that Mr. Dayrell completed his diabolical scheme. He saw that there was now no necessity to fetch another baby. Dr. Collett's death had simplified matters. When Lady Tregenna was sufficiently strong, she was to be told that the real baby had died and that another had been substituted in its place.

"As I can no longer inherit the property," said Mr. Dayrell, "the only other thing left to me to do is to make money. I will make thousands out of that unlucky child. Her ladyship will believe that he is not her own, and I shall blackmail her to any extent."

"And he did so, sir, he did. He paid me, of course. He arranged also that Lady Tregenna was to give me one hundred pounds a year while I remained as nurse to the child—but, oh! no money was worth the misery I endured. I saw my beautiful mistress fading before my eyes. She tried hard, but she could not love the child whom she did not believe to be her own. At last I

began to fear for her reason. Oh, things are as black as black can be, and now that wretch has had the audacity to ask her to give him two thousand pounds within a week. Oh, what is to be done?"

When she had finished speaking, the woman put up her handkerchief to her eyes and sobbed. I turned suddenly to address Dayrell, but he had disappeared.

"Are you going to tell my mistress the truth, sir?" said the nurse, when she had recovered a little composure. "If you expose me I shall be sent to prison; but, of course, I cannot expect you to be silent—I don't even know that I wish it."

"Lady Tregenna must, of course, know the truth," I answered, "but the question is whether Sir John is to be informed or not. My own feeling is that it would be cruelty ever to tell this horrible plot to Sir John. We must remember that he has never doubted for a moment that the child is his own. Your confession will give immense relief to Lady Tregenna—and I think Dayrell for his own sake will consent to leave the country. If he does not do so, of course Sir John must be told. Now come with me at once to Lady Tregenna."

Early as it was, Lady Tregenna was up and in her morning-room. I tapped at the door and was admitted at once, the nurse following me. The lady looked in some astonishment at us both.

"Nurse," she said, "I have just been told that Sir John has returned, but I have not yet seen him. Why, what is the matter?" she added. "Is anything wrong with the"—she spoke with evident antipathy—"with the child?"

"No, madam, he is perfectly well—he is with his father."

The words had scarcely left her lips before a hurried sound was audible in the passage without, and the next moment Sir John burst into the room carrying the baby in his arms.

"Oh, God!" he cried. "Oh, merciful God!" He panted heavily as he spoke, his eyes looked wild; he was by nature a red-faced man, but he was now white as death.

"I have had the most awful shock," he continued. "Kate, what do you think has happened? I returned early this morning, and was only waiting for you to wake to come and see you—of course, I had the little fellow with me. I was standing on the terrace in front of the house when I suddenly missed the child. I went to search for him, and by good luck or, rather, the intervention

of Providence went into the engine-house. The dynamo machine was working, and, oh, God in Heaven! what awful sight do you think my eyes rested upon? There was that wretch Dayrell Tregenna—he had the little chap in his arms—and what do you think he had done? *Removed the cover from the terminals!* The child was stretching out his hand to touch them. One touch would have killed him. With a cry, I sprang forward, and caught the boy in my arms just in time. I scarcely know what I am saying, this shock has unmanned me."

The great, hearty man sank down into the nearest chair. He panted for breath—the child gazed at him in astonishment, then cuddled up into his arms, and raising one chubby hand stroked his cheek.

"Dad," he said, in his baby voice.

The strong likeness to his race came out once again in his manly little face.

Lady Tregenna, who had been seated on the sofa, now rose slowly, her hands were clasped tightly behind her; she crept across the room looking like a woman who was stunned.

"John," she said, "what have you done with—with Dayrell?"

"Ordered him never to show his face in this house again unless he wishes to be arrested on a charge of attempted murder," roared the Baronet. "To think that he should have led that little fellow straight up to his death, and the look on his face—it was fiendish, there is no other word for it."

Lady Tregenna leant against the wall. She panted, and her eyes began to dilate with untold horror. I felt that in another moment she might lose consciousness.

"Look here, Tregenna," I exclaimed, "you may be truly thankful the boy has escaped, but he has escaped, remember, and is perfectly well. Now, I am something of a doctor, and I must ask you to take the child away. Look at your wife—see how agitated she is."

"Why, Kate, old woman, has this been too much for you?" said Tregenna. He rose hastily, strode up to her, put his arms round her and kissed her.

"I never thought you cared enough," he continued. "The fact is, you have puzzled me now and then; but I see—of course, of course, it is all right—bless you, old woman, bless you."

Lady Tregenna did not say a word. She did not even return her husband's embrace.

"Leave her a little," I said, "I am going

to prescribe something which will give her relief, the shock has been very considerable."

"Would you like to keep the boy, Kate?" said the Baronet.

"No, take him, John," she answered, in a voice which could not rise above a whisper.

He left the room, with the lad mounted on his shoulder. The hearty laugh of the baby was heard as the two went down the long corridor together.

"How can I confess the truth to him?" gasped Lady Tregenna, when the door had closed behind the pair. "When he knows the truth it will kill him—it will kill him or drive him mad."

is the child to whom you gave birth. Nurse, tell your story in half-a-dozen words."

The woman did so.

Lady Tregenna listened at first with incredulity, her face like death. Then gradually but slowly hope began to chase away despair from her features, and a burst of tears came to her relief.

"My God, I thank Thee!" she cried, suddenly. "Oh, I can love the child now."

She went on her knees and covered her face with her shaking hands.

We finally agreed that it was unnecessary for Sir John Tregenna ever to know the awful trick which had been played upon his



"WHEN HE KNOWS THE TRUTH IT WILL KILL HIM."

"He knows the truth already," I answered, in a quiet voice.

"He knows the truth?" she repeated.

"Yes. Now try and listen quietly, Lady Tregenna. You were the victim of a terrible hoax. That child is your own child. He never died—he never was changed—he

wife. Dayrell, after his fiendish attempt to lure the heir to his destruction, left the country at once and for ever. As to the nurse, she received a month's wages in lieu of notice, but the prickings of her own conscience were the only other punishment accorded to her.