H. Rider Haggard

Dr. Therne

original

Генри Райдер Хаггард

Dr. Therne

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A confessional narrative from a mad scientist Dr. Therne obsessed with one of the great issues of his day… in this case, vaccination against epidemic diseases like smallpox. His personal fears meet the tragic legacy of other doctors' careless ignorance and spawn a malignant crusade against vaccination that will ultimately create many more victims. Henry Rider Haggard writes to alarm and educate his public, and creates a very engaging villain to carry his message.

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Содержание

H. Rider Haggard
Doctor Therne

In all sincerity
(but without permission)
to the
MEMBERS OF THE JENNER SOCIETY

Author's Note

Some months since the leaders of the Government dismayed their supporters and astonished the world by a sudden surrender to the clamour of the anti-vaccinationists. In the space of a single evening, with a marvellous versatility, they threw to the agitators the ascertained results of generations of the medical faculty, the report of a Royal Commission, what are understood to be their own convictions, and the President of the Local Government Board. After one ineffectual fight the House of Lords answered to the whip, and, under the guise of a "graceful concession," the health of the country was given without appeal into the hand of the "Conscientious Objector."

In his perplexity it has occurred to an observer of these events – as a person who in other lands has seen and learned something of the ravages of smallpox among the unvaccinated – to try to forecast their natural and, in the view of many, their almost certain end. Hence these pages from the life history of the pitiable, but unfortunate Dr. Therne.[1] *Absit omen!* May the prophecy be falsified! But, on the other hand, it may not. Some who are very competent to judge say that it will not; that, on the contrary, this strange paralysis of "the most powerful ministry of the generation" must result hereafter in much terror, and in the sacrifice of innocent lives.

The importance of the issue to those helpless children from whom the State has thus withdrawn its shield, is this writer's excuse for inviting the public to interest itself in a medical tale. As for the moral, each reader can fashion it to his fancy.

[1] Note: It need hardly be explained that Dr. Therne himself is a character convenient to the dramatic purpose of the story, and in no way intended to be taken as a type of anti-vaccinationist medical men, who are, the author believes, as conscientious in principle as they are select in number.

Chapter 1
The Diligence

James Therne is not my real name, for why should I publish it to the world? A year or two ago it was famous – or infamous – enough, but in that time many things have happened. There has been a war, a continental revolution, two scandals of world-wide celebrity, one moral and the other financial, and, to come to events that interest me particularly as a doctor, an epidemic of Asiatic plague in Italy and France, and, stranger still, an outbreak of the mediaeval grain sickness, which is believed to have carried off 20,000 people in Russia and German Poland, consequent, I have no doubt, upon the wet season and poor rye harvest in those countries.

These occurrences and others are more than enough to turn the public mind from the recollection of the appalling smallpox epidemic that passed over England last autumn two years, of which the first fury broke upon the city of Dunchester, my native place, that for many years I had the honour to represent in Parliament. The population of Dunchester, it is true, is smaller by over five thousand souls, and many of those who survive are not so good-looking as they were, but the gap is easily filled and pock-marks are not hereditary. Also, such a horror will never happen again, for now the law of compulsory vaccination is strong enough! Only the dead have cause of complaint, those who were cut off from the world and despatched hot-foot whither we see not. Myself I am certain of nothing; I know too much about the brain and body to have much faith in the soul, and I pray to God that I may be right. Ah! there it comes in. If a God, why not the rest, and who shall say there is no God? Somehow it seems to me that more than once in my life I have seen His Finger.

Yet I pray that I am right, for if I am wrong what a welcome awaits me yonder when grief and chloral and that "slight weakness of the heart" have done their work.

Yes – five thousand of them or more in Dunchester alone, and, making every allowance, I suppose that in this one city there were very many of these – young people mostly – who owed their deaths to me, since it was my persuasion, my eloquent arguments, working upon the minds of their prejudiced and credulous elders, that surely, if indirectly, brought their doom upon them. "A doctor is not infallible, he may make mistakes." Quite so, and if a mistake of his should kill a few thousands, why, that is the act of God (or of Fate) working through his blindness. But if it does not happen to have been a mistake, if, for instance, all those dead, should they still live in any place or shape, could say to me, "James Therne, you are the murderer of our bodies, since, for your own ends, you taught us that which you knew *not* to be the truth."

How then? I ask. So – let them say it if they will. Let all that great cloud of witnesses compass me about, lads and maidens, children and infants, whose bones cumber the churchyards yonder in Dunchester. I defy them, for it is done and cannot be undone. Yet, in their company are two whose eyes I dread to meet: Jane, my daughter, whose life was sacrificed through me, and Ernest Merchison, her lover, who went to seek her in the tomb.

They would not reproach me now, I know, for she was too sweet and loved me too well with all my faults, and, if he proved pitiless in the first torment of his loss, Merchison was a good and honest man, who, understanding my remorse and misery, forgave me before he died. Still, I dread to meet them, who, if that old fable be true and they live, read me for what I am. Yet why should I fear, for all this they knew before they died, and, knowing, could forgive? Surely it is with another vengeance that I must reckon.

Well, after her mother's death my daughter was the only being whom I ever truly loved, and no future mental hell that the imagination can invent would have power to make me suffer more because of her than I have always suffered since the grave closed over her – the virgin martyr sacrificed on the altar of a false prophet and a coward.

* * *

I come of a family of doctors. My grandfather, Thomas Therne, whose name still lives in medicine, was a doctor in the neighbourhood of Dunchester, and my father succeeded to his practice and nothing else, for the old gentleman had lived beyond his means. Shortly after my father's marriage he sold this practice and removed into Dunchester, where he soon acquired a considerable reputation as a surgeon, and prospered, until not long after my birth, just as a brilliant career seemed to be opening itself to him, death closed his book for ever. In attending a case of smallpox, about four months before I was born, he contracted the disease, but the attack was not considered serious and he recovered from it quickly. It would seem, however, that it left some constitutional weakness, for a year later he was found to be suffering from tuberculosis of the lungs, and was ordered to a warmer climate.

Selling his Dunchester practice for what it would fetch to his assistant, Dr. Bell, my father came to Madeira – whither, I scarcely know why, I have also drifted now that all is over for me – for here he hoped to be able to earn a living by doctoring the English visitors. This, however, he could not do, since the climate proved no match for his disease, though he lingered for nearly two years, during which time he spent all the money that he had. When he died there was scarcely enough left to pay for his funeral in the little churchyard yonder that I can see from the windows of this *quinta*. Where he lies exactly I do not know as no record was kept, and the wooden cross, the only monument that my mother could afford to set over him, has long ago rotted away.

Some charitable English people helped my mother to return to England, where we went to live with her mother, who existed on a pension of about 120 pounds a year, in a fishing-village near Brighton. Here I grew up, getting my education – a very good one by the way – at a cheap day school. My mother's wish was that I should become a sailor like her own father, who had been a captain in the Navy, but the necessary money was not forthcoming to put me into the Royal Navy, and my liking for the sea was not strong enough to take me into the merchant service.

From the beginning I wished to be a doctor like my father and grandfather before me, for I knew that I was clever, and I knew also that successful doctors make a great deal of money. Ground down as I had been by poverty from babyhood, already at nineteen years of age I desired money above everything on earth. I saw then, and subsequent experience has only confirmed my views, that the world as it has become under the pressure of high civilisation is a world for the rich. Leaving material comforts and advantages out of the question, what ambition can a man satisfy without money? Take the successful politicians for instance, and it will be found that almost every one of them is rich. This country is too full; there is scant room for the individual. Only intellectual Titans can force their heads above the crowd, and, as a rule, they have not even then the money to take them higher. If I had my life over again – and it is my advice to all young men of ability and ambition – I would leave the old country and settle in America or in one of the great colonies. There, where the conditions are more elastic and the competition is not so cruel, a hard-working man of talent does not need to be endowed with fortune to enable him to rise to the top of the tree.

Well, my desire was to be accomplished, for as it chanced a younger brother of my father, who during his lifetime had never taken any notice of me, died and left me 750 pounds. Seven hundred and fifty pounds! To me at that time it was colossal wealth, for it enabled us to rent some rooms in London, where I entered myself as a medical student at University College.

There is no need for me to dwell upon my college career, but if any one were to take the trouble to consult the old records he would find that it was sufficiently brilliant. I worked hard, and I had a natural, perhaps an hereditary liking, for the work. Medicine always fascinated me. I think it the greatest of the sciences, and from the beginning I was determined that I would be among the greatest of its masters.

At four and twenty, having finished my curriculum with high honours – I was gold medallist of my year in both medicine and surgery – I became house-surgeon to one of the London hospitals. After my term of office was over I remained at the hospital for another year, for I wished to make a practical study of my profession in all its branches before starting a private practice. At the end of this time my mother died while still comparatively young. She had never really recovered from the loss of my father, and, though it was long about it, sorrow sapped her strength at last. Her loss was a shock to me, although in fact we had few tastes in common. To divert my mind, and also because I was somewhat run down and really needed a change, I asked a friend of mine who was a director of a great steamship line running to the West Indies and Mexico to give me a trip out, offering my medicine services in return for the passage. This he agreed to do with pleasure; moreover, matters were so arranged that I could stop in Mexico for three months and rejoin the vessel on her next homeward trip.

After a very pleasant voyage I reached Vera Cruz. It is a quaint and in some ways a pretty place, with its tall cool-looking houses and narrow streets, not unlike Funchal, only more tropical. Whenever I think of it, however, the first memories that leap to my mind are those of the stench of the open drains and of the scavenger carts going their rounds with the *zaphilotes* or vultures actually sitting upon them. As it happened, those carts were very necessary then, for a yellow fever epidemic was raging in the place. Having nothing particular to do I stopped there for three weeks to study it, working in the hospitals with the local doctors, for I felt no fear of yellow fever – only one contagious disease terrifies me, and with that I was soon destined to make acquaintance.

At length I arranged to start for the City of Mexico, to which in those days the journey from Vera Cruz was performed by diligence as the railway as not yet finished. At that time Mexico was a wild country. Wars and revolutions innumerable, together with a certain natural leaning that way, had reduced a considerable proportion of its inhabitants to the road, where they earned a precarious living – not by mending it, but by robbing and occasionally cutting the throats of any travellers whom they could catch.

The track from Vera Cruz to Mexico City runs persistently uphill; indeed, I think the one place is 7000 feet above the level of the other. First, there is the hot zone, where the women by the wayside sell you pineapples and cocoanuts; then the temperate zone, where they offer you oranges and bananas; then the cold country, in which you are expected to drink a filthy liquid extracted from aloes called *pulque*, that in taste and appearance resembles soapy water.

It was somewhere in the temperate zone that we passed a town consisting of fifteen *adobe* or mud houses and seventeen churches. The excessive religious equipment of this city is accounted for by an almost inaccessible mountain stronghold in the neighbourhood. This stronghold for generations had been occupied by brigands, and it was the time-honoured custom of each chieftain of the band, when he retired on a hard-earned competence, to expiate any regrettable incidents in his career by building a church in the town dedicated to his patron saint and to the memory of those whose souls he had helped to Paradise. This pious and picturesque, if somewhat mediaeval, custom has now come to an end, as I understand that the Mexican Government caused the stronghold to be stormed a good many years ago, and put its occupants, to the number of several hundreds, to the sword.

We were eight in the coach, which was drawn by as many mules – four merchants, two priests, myself and the lady who afterwards became my wife. She was a blue-eyed and fair-haired American from New York. Her name, I soon discovered, was Emma Becker, and her father, who was dead, had been a lawyer. We made friends at once, and before we had jolted ten miles on our journey I learned her story. It seemed that she was an orphan with a very small fortune, and only one near relative, an aunt who had married a Mexican named Gomez, the owner of a fine range or *hacienda* situated on the border of the highlands, about eighty miles from the City of Mexico. On the death of her father, being like most American girls adventurous and independent, Miss Becker had accepted an invitation from her aunt Gomez and her husband to come and live with them a while. Now, quite

alone and unescorted, she was on her way to Mexico City, where she expected to be met by some friends of her uncle.

We started from Vera Cruz about mid-day and slept, or rather passed the night, at a filthy inn alive with every sort of insect pest. Two hours before dawn we were bundled into the *diligencia* and slowly dragged up a mountain road so steep that, notwithstanding the blows and oaths of the drivers, the mules had to stop every few hundred yards to rest. I remember that at last I fell asleep, my head reposing on the shoulder of a very fat priest, who snored tempestuously, then awoke to pray, then snored again. It was the voice of Miss Becker, who sat opposite to me, that wakened me.

"Forgive me for disturbing you, Dr. Therne," she said, "but you really must look," and she pointed through the window of the coach.

Following her hand I saw a sight which no one who has witnessed it can ever forget: the sun rising on the mighty peak of Orizaba, the Star Mountain, as the old Aztecs named it. Eighteen thousand feet above our heads towered the great volcano, its foot clothed with forests, its cone dusted with snow. The green flanks of the peak and the country beneath them were still wrapped in shadow, but on its white and lofty crest already the lights of dawn were burning. Never have I seen anything more beautiful than this soaring mountain top flaming like some giant torch over a world of darkness; indeed, the unearthly grandeur of the sight amazed and half paralysed my mind.

A lantern swung from the roof of the coach, and, turning my eyes from the mountain, in its light I saw the face of my travelling companion and – fell in love with it. I had seen it before without any such idea entering my mind; then it had been to me only the face of a rather piquante and pretty girl, but with this strange and inconvenient result, the sight of the dawn breaking upon Orizaba seemed to have worked some change in me. At least, if only for an instant, it had pierced the barrier that day by day we build within us to protect ourselves from the attack of the impulses of nature.

In that moment at any rate there was a look upon this girl's countenance and a light shining in her eyes which overcame my caution and swept me out of myself, for I think that she too was under the shadow of the glory which broke upon the crest of Orizaba. In vain did I try to save myself and to struggle back to common-sense, since hitherto the prospect of domestic love had played no part in my scheme of life. It was useless, so I gave it up, and our eyes met.

Neither of us said anything, but from that time forward we knew that we did not wish to be parted any more.

After a while, to relieve a tension of mind which neither of us cared to reveal, we drifted into desultory and indifferent conversation. In the course of our talk Emma told me that her aunt had written to her that if she could leave the coach at Orizaba she would be within fifty miles of the *hacienda* of La Concepcion, whereas when she reached Mexico City she would still be eighty miles from it. Her aunt had added, however, that this was not practicable at present, why she did not say, and that she must go on to Mexico where some friends would take charge of her until her uncle was able to fetch her.

Presently Emma seemed to fall asleep, at least she shut her eyes. But I could not sleep, and sat there listening to the snores of the fat priest and the strange interminable oaths of the drivers as they thrashed the mules. Opposite to me, tied to the roof of the coach immediately above Emma's head, was a cheap looking-glass, provided, I suppose, for the convenience of passengers when making the toilette of travel. In it I could see myself reflected, so, having nothing better to do, in view of contingencies which of a sudden had become possible, I amused myself by taking count of my personal appearance. On the whole in those days it was not unsatisfactory. In build, I was tall and slight, with thin, nervous hands. My colouring and hair were dark, and I had soft and rather large brown eyes. The best part of my face was my forehead, which was ample, and the worst my mouth, which was somewhat weak. I do not think, however, that any one would have guessed by looking at me as I then appeared at the age of seven and twenty, that I was an exceedingly hard- working man with extraordinary powers of observation and a really retentive memory.

At any rate, I am sure that it was not these qualities which recommended me to Emma Becker, nor, whatever we may have felt under the influences of Orizaba, was it any spiritual affinity. Doctors, I fear, are not great believers in spiritual affinities; they know that such emotions can be accounted for in other ways. Probably Emma was attracted to me because I was dark, and I to her because she was fair. Orizaba and opportunity merely brought out and accentuated these quite natural preferences.

By now the day had broken, and, looking out of the window, I could see that we were travelling along the side of a mountain. Above us the slope was gentle and clothed with sub-tropical trees, while below it became a veritable precipice, in some places absolutely sheer, for the road was cut upon a sort of rocky ledge, although, owing to the vast billows of mist that filled it, nothing could be seen of the gulf beneath.

I was reflecting, I remember, that this would be an ill path to drive with a drunken coachman, when suddenly I saw the off-front mule stumble unaccountably, and, as it fell, heard a shot fired close at hand. Next instant also I saw the driver and his companion spring from the box, and, with a yell of terror, plunge over the edge of the cliff, apparently into the depths below. Then from the narrow compass of that coach arose a perfect pandemonium of sounds, with an under cry of a single word, “Brigands! Brigands!”

The merchants shouted, supplicated their saints, and swore as with trembling hands they tried to conceal loose valuables in their boots and hats; one of the priests too literally howled in his terror, but the other, a man of more dignity, only bowed his head and murmured a prayer. By this time also the mules had tied themselves into a knot and were threatening to overturn the coach, to prevent which our captors, before meddling with us, cut the animals loose with their *machetes* or swords, and drove them over the brink of the abyss, where, like the drivers, they vanished. Then a dusky-faced ruffian, with a scar on his cheek, came to the door of the diligence and bowing politely beckoned to us to come out. As there were at least a dozen of them and resistance was useless, even if our companions could have found the courage to fight, we obeyed, and were placed before the brigands in a line, our backs being set to the edge of the gulf. I was last but one in the line, and beyond me stood Emma Becker, whose hand I held.

Then the tragedy began. Several of the villains seized the first merchant, and, stopping his cries and protestations with a blow in the mouth, stripped him to the shirt, abstracting notes and gold and everything else of value that they could find in various portions of his attire where he had hidden them, and principally, I remember, from the lining of his vest. When they had done with him, they dragged him away and bundled him roughly into the diligence.

Next to this merchant stood the two priests. Of the first of these the brigands asked a question, to which, with some hesitation, the priest – that man who had shown so much terror – replied in the affirmative, whereon his companion looked at him contemptuously and muttered a Spanish phrase which means “Man without shame.” Of him also the same question was asked, in answer to which he shook his head, whereon he was conducted, though without violence or being searched, to the coach, and shut into it with the plundered merchant. Then the thieves went to work with the next victim.

“Dr. Therne,” whispered Emma Becker, “you have a pistol, do you not?”

I nodded my head.

“Will you lend it me? You understand?”

“Yes,” I answered, “I understand, but I hope that things are not so bad as that.”

“They are,” she answered with a quiver in her voice. “I have heard about these Mexican brigands. With the exception of that priest and myself they will put all of you into the coach and push it over the precipice.”

At her words my heart stood still and a palpable mist gathered before my eyes. When it cleared away my brain seemed to awake to an abnormal activity, as though the knowledge that unless it was used to good effect now it would never be used again were spurring it to action. Rapidly I reviewed the situation and considered every possible method of escape. At first I could think of none; then

suddenly I remembered that the driver and his companion, who no doubt knew every inch of the road, had leaped from the coach, apparently over the edge of the precipice. This I felt sure they would not have done had they been going to certain death, since they would have preferred to take their chance of mercy at the hands of the brigands. Moreover, these gentry themselves had driven the mules into the abyss whither those wise animals would never have gone unless there was some foothold for them.

I looked behind me but could discover nothing, for, as is common in Mexico at the hour of dawn, the gulf was absolutely filled with dense vapours. Then I made up my mind that I would risk it and began to shuffle slowly backwards. Already I was near the edge when I remembered Emma Becker and paused to reflect. If I took her with me it would considerably lessen my chances of escape, and at any rate her life was not threatened. But I had not given her the pistol, and at that moment even in my panic there rose before me a vision of her face as I had seen it in the lamplight when she looked up at the glory shining on the crest of Orizaba.

Had it not been for this vision I think it possible that I might have left her. I wish to gloze over nothing; I did not make my own nature, and in these pages I describe it as it was and is without palliation or excuse. I know that this is not the fashion in autobiographies; no one has done it since the time of Pepys, who did not write for publication, and for that very reason my record has its value. I am physically and, perhaps morally also, timid – that is, although I have faced it boldly enough upon occasion, as the reader will learn in the course of my history, I fear the thought of death, and especially of cruel and violent death, such as was near to me at that moment. So much did I fear it then that the mere fact that an acquaintance was in danger and distress would scarcely have sufficed to cause me to sacrifice, or at least to greatly complicate, my own chances of escape in order to promote hers simply because that acquaintance was of the other sex. But Emma had touched a new chord in my nature, and I felt, whether I liked it or not, that whatever I could do for myself I must do for her also. So I shuffled forward again.

“Listen,” I whispered, “I have been to look and I do not believe that the cliff is very steep just here. Will you try it with me?”

“Of course,” she answered; “I had as soon die of a broken neck as in any other way.”

“We must watch our chance then, or they will see us run and shoot. Wait till I give you the signal.”

She nodded her head and we waited.

At length, while the fourth and last merchant, who stood next to me, was being dealt with, just as in our despair we were about to throw ourselves into the gulf before them all, fortune gave us our opportunity. This unhappy man, having probably some inkling of the doom which awaited him, broke suddenly from the hands of his captors, and ran at full speed down the road. After him they went pell-mell, every thief of them except one who remained – fortunately for us upon its farther side – on guard by the door of the diligence in which four people, three merchants and a priest, were now imprisoned. With laughs and shouts they hunted their wretched quarry, firing shots as they ran, till at length one of them overtook the man and cut him down with his *machete*.

“Don’t look, but come,” I whispered to my companion.

In another instant we were at the edge of the cliff, and a foot or so below us was spread the dense, impenetrable blanket of mist. I stopped and hesitated, for the next step might be my last.

“We can’t be worse off, so God help us,” said Emma, and without waiting for me to lead her she swung herself over the edge.

To my intense relief I heard her alight within a few feet, and followed immediately. Now I was at her side, and now we were scrambling and slipping down the precipitous and rocky slope as swiftly as the dense wet fog would let us. I believe that our escape was quite unnoticed. The guard was watching the murder of the merchant, or, if he saw us, he did not venture to leave the carriage door, and the priest who had accepted some offer which was made to him, probably that his life

would be spared if he consented to give absolution to the murderers, was kneeling on the ground, his face hidden in his hands.

As we went the mist grew thinner, and we could see that we were travelling down a steep spur of the precipice, which to our left was quite sheer, and that at the foot of it was a wide plain thickly but not densely covered with trees. In ten minutes we were at the bottom, and as we could neither see nor hear any sign of pursuers we paused for an instant to rest.

Not five yards from us the cliff was broken away, and so straight that a cat could not have climbed it.

“We chose our place well,” I said pointing upwards.

“No,” Emma answered, “we did not choose; it was chosen for us.”

As she spoke a muffled and terrifying sound of agony reached us from above, and then, in the layers of vapour that still stretched between us and the sky, we perceived something huge rushing swiftly down. It appeared; it drew near; it struck, and fell to pieces like a shattered glass. We ran to look, and there before us were the fragments of the diligence, and among them the mangled corpses of five of our fellow-travellers.

This was the fate that we had escaped.

* * *

“Oh! for God’s sake come away,” moaned Emma, and sick with horror we turned and ran, or rather reeled, into the shelter of the trees upon the plain.

Chapter 2
The Hacienda

"What are those?" said Emma presently, pointing to some animals that were half hidden by a clump of wild bananas. I looked and saw that they were two of the mules which the brigands had cut loose from the diligence. There could be no mistake about this, for the harness still hung to them.

"Can you ride?" I asked.

She nodded her head. Then we set to work. Having caught the mules without difficulty, I took off their superfluous harness and put her on the back of one of them, mounting the other myself. There was no time to lose, and we both of us knew it. Just as we were starting I heard a voice behind me calling "senor." Drawing the pistol from my pocket, I swung round to find myself confronted by a Mexican.

"No shoot, senor," he said in broken English, for this man had served upon an American ship, "Me driver, Antonio. My mate go down there," and he pointed to the precipice; "he dead, me not hurt. You run from bad men, me run too, for presently they come look. Where you go?"

"To Mexico," I answered.

"No get Mexico, senor; bad men watch road and kill you with *machete* so," and he made a sweep with his knife, adding "they not want you live tell soldiers."

"Listen," said Emma. "Do you know the *hacienda*, Concepcion, by the town of San Jose?"

"Yes, senora, know it well, the *hacienda* of Senor Gomez; bring you there to-morrow."

"Then show the way," I said, and we started towards the hills.

All that day we travelled over mountains as fast as the mules could carry us, Antonio trotting by our side. At sundown, having seen nothing more of the brigands, who, I suppose, took it for granted that we were dead or were too idle to follow us far, we reached an Indian hut, where we contrived to buy some wretched food consisting of black *frijole* beans and *tortilla* cakes. That night we slept in a kind of hovel made of open poles with a roof of faggots through which the water dropped on us, for it rained persistently for several hours. To be more accurate, Emma slept, for my nerves were too shattered by the recollection of our adventure with the brigands to allow me to close my eyes.

I could not rid my mind of the vision of that coach, broken like an eggshell, and of those shattered shapes within it that this very morning had been men full of life and plans, but who to-night were – what? Nor was it easy to forget that but for the merest chance I might have been one of their company wherever it was gathered now. To a man with a constitutional objection to every form of violence, and, at any rate in those days, no desire to search out the secrets of Death before his time, the thought was horrible.

Leaving the shelter at dawn I found Antonio and the Indian who owned the hut conversing together in the reeking mist with their *serapes* thrown across their mouths, which few Mexicans leave uncovered until after the sun is up. Inflammation of the lungs is the disease they dread more than any other, and the thin night air engenders it.

"What is it, Antonio?" I asked. "Are the brigands after us?"

"No, senor, hope brigands not come now. This senor say much sick San Jose."

I answered that I was very sorry to hear it, but that I meant to go on; indeed, I think that it was only terror of the brigands coupled with the promise of a considerable reward which persuaded him to do so, though, owing to my ignorance of Spanish and his very slight knowledge of English, precisely what he feared I could not discover. In the end we started, and towards evening Antonio pointed out to us the *hacienda* of Concepcion, a large white building standing on a hill which overshadowed San Jose, a straggling little place, half-town, half-village, with a population of about 3,000 inhabitants.

Just as, riding along the rough cobble-paved road, we reached the entrance to the town, I heard shouts, and, turning, saw two mounted men with rifles in their hands apparently calling to us to come back. Taking it for granted that these were the brigands following us up, although, as I afterwards discovered, they were in fact *rurales* or cavalry-police, despite the remonstrances of Antonio I urged the jaded mules forward at a gallop. Thereupon the *rurales*, who had pulled up at a spot marked by a white stone, turned and rode away.

We were now passing down the central street of the town, which I noticed seemed very deserted. As we drew near to the *plaza* or market square we met a cart drawn by two mules and led by a man who had a *serape* wrapped about his nose and mouth as though it were still the hour before the dawn. Over the contents of this cart a black cloth was thrown, beneath which were outlined shapes that suggested – but, no, it could not be. Only why did Antonio cross himself and mutter *Muerte!* or some such word?

Now we were in the *plaza*. This *plaza*, where in happier times the band would play, for all Mexicans are musical, and the population of San Jose was wont to traffic in the day and enjoy itself at night, was bordered by an arched colonnade. In its centre stood a basin of water flowing from a stone fountain of quaint and charming design.

"Look at all those people sleeping," said Emma, as we passed five or six forms that, very small and quiet, lay each under a blanket beneath one of the arches. "Why, there are a lot more just lying down over there. What funny folk to go to bed in public in the afternoon," and she pointed to a number of men, women and children who seemed to be getting up, throwing themselves down and turning round and round upon mattresses and beds of leaves in the shadow of the arcade which we approached.

Presently we were within three paces of this arcade, and as we rode up an aged hag drew a blanket from one of the prostrate forms, revealing a young woman, over whom she proceeded to pour water that she had drawn from a fountain. One glance was enough for me. The poor creature's face was shapeless with confluent smallpox, and her body a sight which I will not describe. I, who was a doctor, could not be mistaken, although, as it chanced, I had never seen a case of smallpox before. The truth is that, although I have no fear of any other human ailment, smallpox has always terrified me.

For this I am not to blame. The fear is a part of my nature, instilled into it doubtless by the shock which my mother received before my birth when she learned that her husband had been attacked by this horrible sickness. So great and vivid was my dread that I refused a very good appointment at a smallpox hospital, and, although I had several opportunities of attending these cases, I declined to undertake them, and on this account suffered somewhat in reputation among those who knew the facts. Indeed, my natural abhorrence went even further, as, to this day, it is only with something of an effort that I can bring myself to inspect the vesicles caused by vaccination. Whether this is because of their similarity to those of smallpox, or owing to the natural association which exists between them, I cannot tell. That it is real enough, however, may be judged by the fact that, terrified as I was at smallpox, and convinced as I have always been of the prophylactic power of vaccination, I could never force myself – until an occasion to be told of – to submit to it. In infancy, no doubt, I was vaccinated, for the operation has left a small and very faint cicatrix on my arm, but infantile vaccination, if unrepeated, is but a feeble protection in later life.

Unconsciously I pulled upon the bridle, and the tired mule stopped. "Malignant smallpox!" I muttered, "and that fool is trying to treat it with cold water!"[2]

[2] Note: Readers of Prescott may remember that when this terrible disease was first introduced by a negro slave of Navaez, and killed out millions of the population of Mexico, the unfortunate Aztecs tried to treat it with cold water. Oddly enough, when, some years ago, the writer was travelling in a part of Mexico where smallpox was prevalent, it came to his notice that this system is still followed among the Indians, as they allege, with good results.

The old woman looked up and saw me. “Si, Senor Inglese,” she said with a ghastly smile, “*viruela, viruela!*” and she went on gabbling something which I could not understand.

“She say,” broke in Antonio, “nearly quarter people dead and plenty sick.”

“For Heaven’s sake, let us get out of this,” I said to Emma, who, seated on the other mule, was staring horror-struck at the sight.

“Oh!” she said, “you are a doctor; can’t you help the poor things?”

“What! and leave you to shift for yourself?”

“Never mind me, Dr. Therne. I can go on to the *hacienda*, or if you like I will stay too; I am not afraid, I was revaccinated last year.”

“Don’t be foolish,” I answered roughly. “I could not dream of exposing you to such risks, also it is impossible for me to do any good here alone and without medicines. Come on at once,” and seizing her mule by the bridle I led it along the road that ran through the town towards the *hacienda* on the height above.

Ten minutes later we were riding in the great courtyard. The place seemed strangely lifeless and silent; indeed, the plaintive mewing of a cat was the only sound to be heard. Presently, however, a dog appeared out of an open doorway. It was a large animal of the mastiff breed, such as might have been expected to bark and become aggressive to strangers. But this it did not do; indeed, it ran forward and greeted us affectionately. We dismounted and knocked at the double door, but no one answered. Finally we entered, and the truth became clear to us – the *hacienda* was deserted. A little burial ground attached to the chapel told us why, for in it were several freshly-made graves, evidently of *peons* or other servants, and in an enclosure, where lay interred some departed members of the Gomez family, another unsodded mound. We discovered afterwards that it was that of the Senor Gomez, Emma’s uncle by marriage.

“The footsteps of smallpox,” I said, pointing to the graves; “we must go on.”

Emma was too overcome to object, for she believed that it was her aunt who slept beneath that mound, so once more we mounted the weary mules. But we did not get far. Within half a mile of the *hacienda* we were met by two armed *rurales*, who told us plainly that if we attempted to go further they would shoot.

Then we understood. We had penetrated a smallpox cordon, and must stop in it until forty days after the last traces of the disease had vanished. This, in a wild part of Mexico, where at that time vaccination was but little practised and medical assistance almost entirely lacking, would not be until half or more of the unprotected population was dead and many of the remainder were blinded, deafened or disfigured.

Back we crept to the deserted *hacienda*, and there in this hideous nest of smallpox we took up our quarters, choosing out of the many in the great pile sleeping rooms that had evidently not been used for months or years. Food we did not lack, for sheep and goats were straying about untended, while in the garden we found fruit and vegetables in plenty, and in the pantries flour and other stores.

At first Emma was dazed and crushed by fatigue and emotion, but she recovered her spirits after a night’s sleep and on learning from Antonio, who was told it by some *peon*, that it was not her aunt that the smallpox had killed, but her uncle by marriage, whom she had never seen. Having no fear of the disease, indeed, she became quite resigned and calm, for the strangeness and novelty of the position absorbed and interested her. Also, to my alarm, it excited her philanthropic instincts, her great idea being to turn the *hacienda* into a convalescent smallpox hospital, of which she was to be the nurse and I the doctor. Indeed she refused to abandon this mad scheme until I pointed out that in the event of any of our patients dying, most probably we should both be murdered for wizards with the evil eye. As a matter of fact, without medicine or assistance we could have done little or nothing.

Oh, what a pestilence was that of which for three weeks or so we were the daily witnesses, for from the flat roof of the *hacienda* we could see straight on to the *plaza* of the little town. And when at night we could not see, still we could hear the wails of the dying and bereaved, the eternal clang

of the church bells, rung to scare away the demon of disease, and the midnight masses chanted by the priests, that grew faint and fainter as their brotherhood dwindled, until at last they ceased. And so it went on in the tainted, stricken place until the living were not enough to bury the dead, or to do more than carry food and water to the sick.

It would seem that about twelve years before a philanthropic American enthusiast, armed with a letter of recommendation from whoever at that date was President of Mexico, and escorted by a small guard, descended upon San Jose to vaccinate it. For a few days all went well, for the enthusiast was a good doctor, who understood how to treat ophthalmia and to operate for squint, both of which complaints were prevalent in San Jose. Then his first vaccination patients developed vesicles, and the trouble began. The end of the matter was that the local priests, a very ignorant class of men, interfered, declaring that smallpox was a trial sent from Heaven which it was impious to combat, and that in any case vaccination was the worse disease of the two.

As the *viruela* had scarcely visited San Jose within the memory of man and the vesicles looked alarming, the population, true children of the Church, agreed with their pastors, and, from purely religious motives, hooted and stoned the philanthropic "Americano" and his guard out of the district. Now they and their innocent children were reaping the fruits of the piety of these conscientious objectors.

After the first fortnight this existence in an atmosphere of disease became absolutely terrible to me. Not an hour of the day passed that I did not imagine some symptom of smallpox, and every morning when we met at breakfast I glanced at Emma with anxiety. The shadow of the thing lay deep upon my nerves, and I knew well that if I stopped there much longer I should fall a victim to it in the body. In this emergency, by means of Antonio, I opened negotiations with the officer of the *rurales*, and finally, after much secret bargaining, it was arranged that in consideration of a sum of two hundred dollars – for by good luck I had escaped from the brigands with my money – our flight through the cordon of guards should not be observed in the darkness.

We were to start at nine o'clock on a certain night. At a quarter to that hour I went to the stable to see that everything was ready, and in the courtyard outside of it found Antonio seated against the water tank groaning and writhing with pains in the back. One looked showed me that he had developed the usual symptoms, so, feeling that no time was to be lost, I saddled the mules myself and took them round.

"Where is Antonio?" asked Emma as she mounted.

"He has gone on ahead," I answered, "to be sure that the road is clear; he will meet us beyond the mountains."

Poor Antonio! I wonder what became of him; he was a good fellow, and I hope that he recovered. It grieved me much to leave him, but after all I had my own safety to think of, and still more that of Emma, who had grown very dear to me. Perhaps one day I shall find him "beyond the mountains," but, if so, that is a meeting from which I expect no joy.

The rest of our journey was strange enough, but it has nothing to do with this history. Indeed, I have only touched upon these long past adventures in a far land because they illustrate the curious fatality by the workings of which every important event of my life has taken place under the dreadful shadow of smallpox. I was born under that shadow, I wedded under it, I – but the rest shall be told in its proper order.

* * *

In the end we reached Mexico City in safety, and there Emma and I were married. Ten days later we were on board ship steaming for England.

Chapter 3
Sir John Bell

Now it is that I came to the great and terrible event of my life, which in its result turned me into a false witness and a fraud, and bound upon my spirit a weight of blood-guiltiness greater than a man is often called upon to bear. As I have not scrupled to show I have constitutional weaknesses – more, I am a sinner, I know it; I have sinned against the code of my profession, and have preached a doctrine I knew to be false, using all my skill and knowledge to confuse and pervert the minds of the ignorant. And yet I am not altogether responsible for these sins, which in truth in the first place were forced upon me by shame and want and afterwards by the necessities of my ambition. Indeed, in that dark and desperate road of deceit there is no room to turn; the step once taken can never be retraced.

But if I have sinned, how much greater is the crime of the man who swore away my honour and forced me through those gateways? Surely on his head and not on mine should rest the burden of my deeds; yet he prospered all his life, and I have been told that his death was happy and painless. This man's career furnishes one of the few arguments that to my sceptical mind suggest the existence of a place of future reward and punishment, for how is it possible that so great a villain should reap no fruit from his rich sowing of villainy? If it is possible, then verily this world is the real hell wherein the wicked are lords and the good their helpless and hopeless slaves.

* * *

Emma Becker when she became my wife brought with her a small dowry of about five thousand dollars, or a thousand pounds, and this sum we both agreed would be best spent in starting me in professional life. It was scarcely sufficient to enable me to buy a practice of the class which I desired, so I determined that I would set to work to build one up, as with my ability and record I was certain that I could do. By preference, I should have wished to begin in London, but there the avenue to success is choked, and I had not the means to wait until by skill and hard work I could force my way along it.

London being out of the question, I made up my mind to try my fortune in the ancient city of Dunchester, where the name of Therne was still remembered, as my grandfather and father had practised there before me. I journeyed to the place and made inquiries, to find that, although there were plenty of medical men of a sort, there was only one whose competition I had cause to fear. Of the others, some had no presence, some no skill, and some no character; indeed, one of them was known to drink.

With Sir John Bell, whose good fortune it was to be knighted in recognition of his attendance upon a royal duchess who chanced to contract the measles while staying in the town, the case was different. He began life as assistant to my father, and when his health failed purchased the practice from him for a miserable sum, which, as he was practically in possession, my father was obliged to accept. From that time forward his success met with no check. By no means a master of his art, Sir John supplied with assurance what he lacked in knowledge, and atoned for his mistakes by the readiness of a bluff and old- fashioned sympathy that was transparent to few.

In short, if ever a *faux bonhomme* existed, Sir John Bell was the man. Needless to say he was as popular as he was prosperous. Such of the practice of Dunchester as was worth having soon fell into his hands, and few indeed were the guineas that slipped out of his fingers into the pocket of a poorer brother. Also, he had a large consulting connection in the county. But if his earnings were great so were his spendings, for it was part of his system to accept civic and magisterial offices and

to entertain largely in his official capacities. This meant that the money went out as fast as it came in, and that, however much was earned, more was always needed.

When I visited Dunchester to make inquiries I made a point of calling on Sir John, who received me in his best "heavy-father" manner, taking care to inform me that he was keeping Lord So-and-so waiting in his consulting-room in order to give me audience. Going straight to the point, I told him that I thought of starting to practise in Dunchester, which information, I could see, pleased him little.

"Of course, my dear boy," he said, "you being your father's son I should be delighted, and would do everything in my power to help you, but at the same time I must point out that were Galen, or Jenner, or Harvey to reappear on earth, I doubt if they could make a decent living in Dunchester."

"All the same, I mean to have a try, Sir John," I answered cheerfully. "I suppose you do not want an assistant, do you?"

"Let me see; I think you said you were married, did you not?"

"Yes," I answered, well knowing that Sir John, having disposed of his elder daughter to an incompetent person of our profession, who had become the plague of his life, was desirous of putting the second to better use.

"No, my dear boy, no, I have an assistant already," and he sighed, this time with genuine emotion. "If you come here you will have to stand upon your own legs."

"Quite so, Sir John, but I shall still hope for a few crumbs from the master's table."

"Yes, yes, Therne, in anything of that sort you may rely upon me," and he bowed me out with an effusive smile.

" – to poison the crumbs," I thought to myself, for I was never for one moment deceived as to this man's character.

* * *

A fortnight later Emma and I came to Dunchester and took up our abode in a quaint red-brick house of the Queen Anne period, which we hired for a not extravagant rent of 80 pounds a year. Although the position of this house was not fashionable, nothing could have been more suitable from a doctor's point of view, as it stood in a little street near the market-place and absolutely in the centre of the city. Moreover, it had two beautiful reception chambers on the ground floor, oak-panelled, and with carved Adam's mantelpieces, which made excellent waiting-rooms for patients. Some time passed, however, and our thousand pounds, in which the expense of furnishing had made a considerable hole, was melting rapidly before those rooms were put to a practical use. Both I and my wife did all that we could to get practice. We called upon people who had been friends of my father and grandfather; we attended missionary and other meetings of a non-political character; regardless of expense we went so far as to ask old ladies to tea.

They came, they drank the tea and inspected the new furniture; one of them even desired to see my instruments and when, fearing to give offence, I complied and produced them, she remarked that they were not nearly so nice as dear Sir John's, which had ivory handles. Cheerfully would I have shown her that if the handles were inferior the steel was quite serviceable, but I swallowed my wrath and solemnly explained that it was not medical etiquette for a young doctor to use ivory.

Beginning to despair, I applied for one or two minor appointments in answer to advertisements inserted by the Board of Guardians and other public bodies. In each case was I not only unsuccessful, but men equally unknown, though with a greatly inferior college and hospital record, were chosen over my head. At length, suspecting that I was not being fairly dealt by, I made inquiries to discover that at the bottom of all this ill success was none other than Sir John Bell. It appeared that in several instances, by the shrugs of his thick shoulders and shakes of his ponderous head, he had prevented my being employed. Indeed, in the case of the public bodies, with all of which he had authority either as an official or as an honorary adviser, he had directly vetoed my appointment by the oracular

announcement that, after ample inquiry among medical friends in London, he had satisfied himself that I was not a suitable person for the post.

When I had heard this and convinced myself that it was substantially true – for I was always too cautious to accept the loose and unsifted gossip of a provincial town – I think that for the first time in my life I experienced the passion of hate towards a human being. Why should this man who was so rich and powerful thus devote his energies to the destruction of a brother practitioner who was struggling and poor? At the time I set it down to pure malice, into which without doubt it blossomed at last, not understanding that in the first place on Sir John's part it was in truth terror born of his own conscious mediocrity. Like most inferior men, he was quick to recognise his master, and, either in the course of our conversations or through inquiries that he made concerning me, he had come to the conclusion that so far as professional ability was concerned I *was* his master. Therefore, being a creature of petty and dishonest mind, he determined to crush me before I could assert myself.

Now, having ascertained all this beyond reasonable doubt, there were three courses open to me: to make a public attack upon Sir John, to go away and try my fortune elsewhere, or to sit still and await events. A more impetuous man would have adopted the first of these alternatives, but my experience of life, confirmed as it was by the advice of Emma, who was a shrewd and far- seeing woman, soon convinced me that if I did so I should have no more chance of success than would an egg which undertook a crusade against a brick wall. Doubtless the egg might stain the wall and gather the flies of gossip about its stain, but the end of it must be that the wall would still stand, whereas the egg would no longer be an egg. The second plan had more attractions, but my resources were now too low to allow me to put it into practice. Therefore, having no other choice, I was forced to adopt the third, and, exercising that divine patience which characterises the Eastern nations but is so lacking in our own, to attend humbly upon fate until it should please it to deal to me a card that I could play.

In time fate dealt to me that card and my long suffering was rewarded, for it proved a very ace of trumps. It happened thus.

About a year after I arrived in Dunchester I was elected a member of the City Club. It is a pleasant place, where ladies are admitted to lunch, and I used it a good deal in the hope of making acquaintances who might be useful to me. Among the *habitues* of this club was a certain Major Selby, who, having retired from the army and being without occupation, was generally to be found in the smoking or billiard room with a large cigar between his teeth and a whisky and soda at his side. In face, the Major was florid and what people call healthy-looking, an appearance that to a doctor's eye very often conveys no assurance of physical well-being. Being a genial-mannered man, he would fall into conversation with whoever might be near to him, and thus I came to be slightly acquainted with him. In the course of our chats he frequently mentioned his ailments, which, as might be expected in the case of such a luxurious liver, were gouty in their origin.

One afternoon when I was sitting alone in the smoking-room, Major Selby came in and limped to an armchair.

"Hullo, Major, have you got the gout again?" I asked jocosely.

"No, doctor; at least that pompous old beggar, Bell, says I haven't. My leg has been so confoundedly painful and stiff for the last few days that I went to see him this morning, but he told me that it was only a touch of rheumatism, and gave me some stuff to rub it with."

"Oh, and did he look at your leg?"

"Not he. He says that he can tell what my ailments are with the width of the street between us."

"Indeed," I said, and some other men coming in the matter dropped.

Four days later I was in the club at the same hour, and again Major Selby entered. This time he walked with considerable difficulty, and I noticed an expression of pain and *malaise* upon his rubicund countenance. He ordered a whisky and soda from the servant, and then sat down near me.

"Rheumatism no better, Major?" I asked.

"No, I went to see old Bell about it again yesterday, but he pooh-poohs it and tells me to go on rubbing in the liniment and get the footman to help when I am tired. Well, I obeyed orders, but it hasn't done me much good, and how the deuce rheumatism can give a fellow a bruise on the leg, I don't know."

"A bruise on the leg?" I said astonished.

"Yes, a bruise on the leg, and, if you don't believe me, look here," and, dragging up his trouser, he showed me below the knee a large inflamed patch of a dusky hue, in the centre of which one of the veins could be felt to be hard and swollen.

"Has Sir John Bell seen that?" I asked.

"Not he. I wanted him to look at it, but he was in a hurry, and said I was just like an old woman with a sore on show, so I gave it up."

"Well, if I were you, I'd go home and insist upon his coming to look at it."

"What do you mean, doctor?" he asked growing alarmed at my manner.

"Oh, it is a nasty place, that is all; and I think that when Sir John has seen it, he will tell you to keep quiet for a few days."

Major Selby muttered something uncomplimentary about Sir John, and then asked me if I would come home with him.

"I can't do that as a matter of medical etiquette, but I'll see you into a cab. No, I don't think I should drink that whisky if I were you, you want to keep yourself cool and quiet."

So Major Selby departed in his cab and I went home, and, having nothing better to do, turned up my notes on various cases of venous thrombosis, or blood-clot in the veins, which I had treated at one time or another.

While I was still reading them there came a violent ring at the bell, followed by the appearance of a very agitated footman, who gasped out: -

"Please, sir, come to my master, Major Selby, he has been taken ill."

"I can't, my good man," I answered, "Sir John Bell is his doctor."

"I have been to Sir John's, sir, but he has gone away for two days to attend a patient in the country, and the Major told me to come for you."

Then I hesitated no longer. As we hurried to the house, which was close at hand, the footman told me that the Major on reaching home took a cup of tea and sent for a cab to take him to Sir John Bell. As he was in the act of getting into the cab, suddenly he fell backwards and was picked up panting for breath, and carried into the dining-room. By this time we had reached the house, of which the door was opened as we approached it by Mrs. Selby herself, who seemed in great distress.

"Don't talk now, but take me to your husband," I said, and was led into the dining-room, where the unfortunate man lay groaning on the sofa.

"Glad you've come," he gasped. "I believe that fool, Bell, has done for me."

Asking those present in the room, a brother and a grown-up son of the patient, to stand back, I made a rapid examination; then I wrote a prescription and sent it round to the chemist – it contained ammonia, I remember – and ordered hot fomentations to be placed upon the leg. While these matters were being attended to I went with the relations into another room.

"What is the matter with him, doctor?" asked Mrs. Selby.

"It is, I think, a case of what is called blood-clot, which has formed in the veins of the leg," I answered. "Part of this clot has been detached by exertion, or possibly by rubbing, and, travelling upwards, has become impacted in one of the pulmonary arteries."

"Is it serious?" asked the poor wife.

"Of course we must hope for the best," I said; "but it is my duty to tell you that I do not myself think Major Selby will recover; how long he will last depends upon the size of the clot which has got into the artery."

"Oh, this is ridiculous," broke in Mr. Selby. "My brother has been under the care of Sir John Bell, the ablest doctor in Dunchester, who told him several times that he was suffering from nothing but rheumatism, and now this gentleman starts a totally different theory, which, if it were true, would prove Sir John to be a most careless and incompetent person."

"I am very sorry," I answered; "I can only hope that Sir John is right and I am wrong. So that there may be no subsequent doubt as to what I have said, with your leave I will write down my diagnosis and give it to you."

When this was done I returned to the patient, and Mr. Selby, taking my diagnosis, telegraphed the substance of it to Sir John Bell for his opinion. In due course the answer arrived from Sir John, regretting that there was no train by which he could reach Dunchester that night, giving the name of another doctor who was to be called in, and adding, incautiously enough, "Dr. Therne's diagnosis is purely theoretical and such as might be expected from an inexperienced man."

Meanwhile the unfortunate Major was dying. He remained conscious to the last, and, in spite of everything that I could do, suffered great pain. Amongst other things he gave an order that a *post-mortem* examination should be made to ascertain the cause of his death.

When Mr. Selby had read the telegram from Sir John he handed it to me, saying, "It is only fair that you should see this."

I read it, and, having asked for and obtained a copy, awaited the arrival of the other doctor before taking my departure. When at length he came Major Selby was dead.

Two days later the *post-mortem* was held. There were present at it Sir John Bell, myself, and the third *medico*, Dr. Jeffries. It is unnecessary to go into details, but in the issue I was proved to be absolutely right. Had Sir John taken the most ordinary care and precaution his patient need not have died – indeed, his death was caused by the treatment. The rubbing of the leg detached a portion of the clot, that might easily have been dissolved by rest and local applications. As it was, it went to his lung, and he died.

When he saw how things were going, Sir John tried to minimise matters, but, unfortunately for him, I had my written diagnosis and a copy of his telegram, documents from which he could not escape. Nor could he deny the results of the *post-mortem*, which took place in the presence and with the assistance of the third practitioner, a sound and independent, though not a very successful, man.

When everything was over there was something of a scene. Sir John asserted that my conduct had been impertinent and unprofessional. I replied that I had only done my duty and appealed to Dr. Jeffries, who remarked drily that we had to deal not with opinions and theories but with facts and that the facts seemed to bear me out. On learning the truth, the relatives, who until now had been against me, turned upon Sir John and reproached him in strong terms, after which they went away leaving us face to face. There was an awkward silence, which I broke by saying that I was sorry to have been the unwilling cause of this unpleasantness.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.