ALLEN GRANT

HILDA WADE, A WOMAN WITH TENACITY OF PURPOSE

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

In putting before the public the last work by Mr. Grant Allen, the publishers desire to express their deep regret at the author's unexpected and lamented death—a regret in which they are sure to be joined by the many thousand readers whom he did so much to entertain. A man of curiously varied and comprehensive knowledge, and with the most charming personality; a writer who, treating of a wide variety of subjects, touched nothing which he did not make distinctive, he filled a place which no man living can exactly occupy. The last chapter of this volume had been roughly sketched by Mr. Allen before his final illness, and his anxiety, when debarred from work, to see it finished, was relieved by the considerate kindness of his friend and neighbour, Dr. Conan Doyle, who, hearing of his trouble, talked it over with him, gathered his ideas, and finally wrote it out for him in the form in which it now appears—a beautiful and pathetic act of friendship which it is a pleasure to record.

CHAPTER I
THE EPISODE OF THE PATIENT WHO DISAPPOINTED HER DOCTOR

Hilda Wade's gift was so unique, so extraordinary, that I must illustrate it, I think, before I attempt to describe it. But first let me say a word of explanation about the Master.

I have never met anyone who impressed me so much with a sense of GREATNESS as Professor Sebastian. And this was not due to his scientific eminence alone: the man's strength and keenness struck me quite as forcibly as his vast attainments. When he first came to St. Nathaniel's Hospital, an eager, fiery-eyed physiologist, well past the prime of life, and began to preach with all the electric force of his vivid personality that the one thing on earth worth a young man's doing was to work in his laboratory, attend his lectures, study disease, and be a scientific doctor, dozens of us were infected by his contagious enthusiasm. He proclaimed the gospel of germs; and the germ of his own zeal flew abroad in the hospital: it ran through the wards as if it were typhoid fever. Within a few months, half the students were converted from lukewarm observers of medical routine into flaming apostles of the new methods.

The greatest authority in Europe on comparative anatomy, now that Huxley was taken from us, he had devoted his later days to the pursuit of medicine proper, to which he brought a mind stored with luminous analogies from the lower animals. His very appearance held one. Tall, thin, erect, with an ascetic profile not unlike Cardinal Manning's, he represented that abstract form of asceticism which consists in absolute self-sacrifice to a mental ideas, not that which consists in religious abnegation. Three years of travel in Africa had tanned his skin for life. His long white hair, straight and silvery as it fell, just curled in one wave-like inward sweep where it turned and rested on the stooping shoulders. His pale face was clean-shaven, save for a thin and wiry grizzled moustache, which cast into stronger relief the deep-set, hawk-like eyes and the acute, intense, intellectual features. In some respects, his countenance reminded me often of Dr. Martineau's: in others it recalled the knife-like edge, unturnable, of his great predecessor, Professor Owen. Wherever he went, men turned to stare at him. In Paris, they took him for the head of the English Socialists; in Russia, they declared he was a Nihilist emissary. And they were not far wrong—in essence; for Sebastian's stern, sharp face was above all things the face of a man absorbed and engrossed by one overpowering pursuit in life—the sacred thirst of knowledge, which had swallowed up his entire nature.

He WAS what he looked—the most single-minded person I have ever come across. And when I say single-minded, I mean just that, and no more. He had an End to attain—the advancement of science, and he went straight towards the End, looking neither to the right nor to the left for anyone. An American millionaire once remarked to him of some ingenious appliance he was describing: "Why, if you were to perfect that apparatus, Professor, and take out a patent for it, I reckon you'd make as much money as I have made." Sebastian withered him with a glance. "I have no time to waste," he replied, "on making money!"

So, when Hilda Wade told me, on the first day I met her, that she wished to become a nurse at Nathaniel's, "to be near Sebastian," I was not at all astonished. I took her at her word. Everybody who meant business in any branch of the medical art, however humble, desired to be close to our rare teacher—to drink in his large thought, to profit by his clear insight, his wide experience. The man of Nathaniel's was revolutionising practice; and those who wished to feel themselves abreast of the modern movement were naturally anxious to cast in their lot with him. I did not wonder, therefore, that Hilda Wade, who herself possessed in so large a measure the deepest feminine gift—intuition—should seek a place under the famous professor who represented the other side of the same endowment in its masculine embodiment—instinct of diagnosis.

Hilda Wade herself I will not formally introduce to you: you will learn to know her as I proceed with my story.

I was Sebastian's assistant, and my recommendation soon procured Hilda Wade the post she so strangely coveted. Before she had been long at Nathaniel's, however, it began to dawn upon me that her reasons for desiring to attend upon our revered Master were not wholly and solely scientific. Sebastian, it is true, recognised her value as a nurse from the first; he not only allowed that she was a good assistant, but he also admitted that her subtle knowledge of temperament sometimes enabled her closely to approach his own reasoned scientific analysis of a case and its probable development. "Most women," he said to me once, "are quick at reading THE PASSING EMOTION. They can judge with astounding correctness from a shadow on one's face, a catch in one's breath, a movement of one's hands, how their words or deeds are affecting us. We cannot conceal our feelings from them. But underlying character they do not judge so well as fleeting expression. Not what Mrs. Jones IS in herself, but what Mrs. Jones is now thinking and feeling—there lies their great success as psychologists. Most men, on the contrary, guide their life by definite FACTS—by signs, by symptoms, by observed data. Medicine itself is built upon a collection of such reasoned facts. But this woman, Nurse Wade, to a certain extent, stands intermediate mentally between the two sexes. She recognises TEMPERAMENT—the fixed form of character, and what it is likely to do—in a degree which I have never seen equalled elsewhere. To that extent, and within proper limits of supervision, I acknowledge her faculty as a valuable adjunct to a scientific practitioner."

Still, though Sebastian started with a predisposition in favour of Hilda Wade—a pretty girl appeals to most of us—I could see from the beginning that Hilda Wade was by no means enthusiastic for Sebastian, like the rest of the hospital:

"He is extraordinarily able," she would say, when I gushed to her about our Master; but that was the most I could ever extort from her in the way of praise. Though she admitted intellectually Sebastian's gigantic mind, she would never commit herself to anything that sounded like personal admiration. To call him "the prince of physiologists" did not satisfy me on that head. I wanted her to exclaim, "I adore him! I worship him! He is glorious, wonderful!"

I was also aware from an early date that, in an unobtrusive way, Hilda Wade was watching Sebastian, watching him quietly, with those wistful, earnest eyes, as a cat watches a mouse-hole; watching him with mute inquiry, as if she expected each moment to see him do something different from what the rest of us expected of him. Slowly I gathered that Hilda Wade, in the most literal sense, had come to Nathaniel's, as she herself expressed it, "to be near Sebastian."

Gentle and lovable as she was in every other aspect, towards Sebastian she seemed like a lynx-eyed detective. She had some object in view, I thought, almost as abstract as his own—some object to which, as I judged, she was devoting her life quite as single-mindedly as Sebastian himself had devoted his to the advancement of science.

"Why did she become a nurse at all?" I asked once of her friend, Mrs. Mallet. "She has plenty of money, and seems well enough off to live without working."

"Oh, dear, yes," Mrs. Mallet answered. "She is independent, quite; has a tidy little income of her own—six or seven hundred a year—and she could choose her own society. But she went in for this mission fad early; she didn't intend to marry, she said; so she would like to have some work to do in life. Girls suffer like that, nowadays. In her case, the malady took the form of nursing."

"As a rule," I ventured to interpose, "when a pretty girl says she doesn't intend to marry, her remark is premature. It only means—"

"Oh, yes, I know. Every girl says it; 'tis a stock property in the popular masque of Maiden Modesty. But with Hilda it is different. And the difference is—that Hilda means it!"

"You are right," I answered. "I believe she means it. Yet I know one man at least—" for I admired her immensely.

Mrs. Mallet shook her head and smiled. "It is no use, Dr. Cumberledge," she answered. "Hilda will never marry. Never, that is to say, till she has attained some mysterious object she seems to have in view, about which she never speaks to anyone—not even to me. But I have somehow guessed it!"

"And it is?"

"Oh, I have not guessed what it IS: I am no Oedipus. I have merely guessed that it exists. But whatever it may be, Hilda's life is bounded by it. She became a nurse to carry it out, I feel confident. From the very beginning, I gather, a part of her scheme was to go to St. Nathaniel's. She was always bothering us to give her introductions to Dr. Sebastian; and when she met you at my brother Hugo's, it was a preconcerted arrangement; she asked to sit next you, and meant to induce you to use your influence on her behalf with the Professor. She was dying to get there."

"It is very odd," I mused. "But there!—women are inexplicable!"

"And Hilda is in that matter the very quintessence of woman. Even I, who have known her for years, don't pretend to understand her."

A few months later, Sebastian began his great researches on his new anaesthetic. It was a wonderful set of researches. It promised so well. All Nat's (as we familiarly and affectionately styled St. Nathaniel's) was in a fever of excitement over the drug for a twelvemonth.

The Professor obtained his first hint of the new body by a mere accident. His friend, the Deputy Prosector of the Zoological Society, had mixed a draught for a sick raccoon at the Gardens, and, by some mistake in a bottle, had mixed it wrongly. (I purposely refrain from mentioning the ingredients, as they are drugs which can be easily obtained in isolation at any chemist's, though when compounded they form one of the most dangerous and difficult to detect of organic poisons. I do not desire to play into the hands of would-be criminals.) The compound on which the Deputy Prosector had thus accidentally lighted sent the raccoon to sleep in the most extraordinary manner. Indeed, the raccoon slept for thirty-six hours on end, all attempts to awake him, by pulling his tail or tweaking his hair being quite unavailing. This was a novelty in narcotics; so Sebastian was asked to come and look at the slumbering brute. He suggested the attempt to perform an operation on the somnolent raccoon by removing, under the influence of the drug, an internal growth, which was considered the probable cause of his illness. A surgeon was called in, the growth was found and removed, and the raccoon, to everybody's surprise, continued to slumber peacefully on his straw for five hours afterwards. At the end of that time he awoke, and stretched himself as if nothing had happened; and though he was, of course, very weak from loss of blood, he immediately displayed a most royal hunger. He ate up all the maize that was offered him for breakfast, and proceeded to manifest a desire for more by most unequivocal symptoms.

Sebastian was overjoyed. He now felt sure he had discovered a drug which would supersede chloroform—a drug more lasting in its immediate effects, and yet far less harmful in its ultimate results on the balance of the system. A name being wanted for it, he christened it "lethodyne." It was the best pain-luller yet invented.

For the next few weeks, at Nat's, we heard of nothing but lethodyne. Patients recovered and patients died; but their deaths or recoveries were as dross to lethodyne, an anaesthetic that might revolutionise surgery, and even medicine! A royal road through disease, with no trouble to the doctor and no pain to the patient! Lethodyne held the field. We were all of us, for the moment, intoxicated with lethodyne.

Sebastian's observations on the new agent occupied several months. He had begun with the raccoon; he went on, of course, with those poor scapegoats of physiology, domestic rabbits. Not that in this particular case any painful experiments were in contemplation. The Professor tried the drug on a dozen or more quite healthy young animals—with the strange result that they dozed off quietly, and never woke up again. This nonplussed Sebastian. He experimented once more on another raccoon, with a smaller dose; the raccoon fell asleep, and slept like a top for fifteen hours, at the end of which time he woke up as if nothing out of the common had happened. Sebastian fell back upon rabbits

again, with smaller and smaller doses. It was no good; the rabbits all died with great unanimity, until the dose was so diminished that it did not send them off to sleep at all. There was no middle course, apparently, to the rabbit kind, lethodyne was either fatal or else inoperative. So it proved to sheep. The new drug killed, or did nothing.

I will not trouble you with all the details of Sebastian's further researches; the curious will find them discussed at length in Volume 237 of the Philosophical Transactions. (See also Comptes Rendus de l'Academie de Medecine: tome 49, pp. 72 and sequel.) I will restrict myself here to that part of the inquiry which immediately refers to Hilda Wade's history.

"If I were you," she said to the Professor one morning, when he was most astonished at his contradictory results, "I would test it on a hawk. If I dare venture on a suggestion, I believe you will find that hawks recover."

"The deuce they do!" Sebastian cried. However, he had such confidence in Nurse Wade's judgment that he bought a couple of hawks and tried the treatment on them. Both birds took considerable doses, and, after a period of insensibility extending to several hours, woke up in the end quite bright and lively.

"I see your principle," the Professor broke out. "It depends upon diet. Carnivores and birds of prey can take lethodyne with impunity; herbivores and fruit-eaters cannot recover, and die of it. Man, therefore, being partly carnivorous, will doubtless be able more or less to stand it."

Hilda Wade smiled her sphinx-like smile. "Not quite that, I fancy," she answered. "It will kill cats, I feel sure; at least, most domesticated ones. But it will NOT kill weasels. Yet both are carnivores."

"That young woman knows too much!" Sebastian muttered to me, looking after her as she glided noiselessly with her gentle tread down the long white corridor. "We shall have to suppress her, Cumberledge.... But I'll wager my life she's right, for all that. I wonder, now, how the dickens she guessed it!"

"Intuition," I answered.

He pouted his under lip above the upper one, with a dubious acquiescence. "Inference, I call it," he retorted. "All woman's so-called intuition is, in fact, just rapid and half-unconscious inference."

He was so full of the subject, however, and so utterly carried away by his scientific ardour, that I regret to say he gave a strong dose of lethodyne at once to each of the matron's petted and pampered Persian cats, which lounged about her room and were the delight of the convalescents. They were two peculiarly lazy sultanas of cats—mere jewels of the harem—Oriental beauties that loved to bask in the sun or curl themselves up on the rug before the fire and dawdle away their lives in congenial idleness. Strange to say, Hilda's prophecy came true. Zuleika settled herself down comfortably in the Professor's easy chair and fell into a sound sleep from which there was no awaking; while Roxana met fate on the tiger-skin she loved, coiled up in a circle, and passed from this life of dreams, without knowing it, into one where dreaming is not. Sebastian noted the facts with a quiet gleam of satisfaction in his watchful eye, and explained afterwards, with curt glibness to the angry matron, that her favourites had been "canonised in the roll of science, as painless martyrs to the advancement of physiology."

The weasels, on the other hand, with an equal dose, woke up after six hours as lively as crickets. It was clear that carnivorous tastes were not the whole solution, for Roxana was famed as a notable mouser.

"Your principle?" Sebastian asked our sibyl, in his brief, quick way.

Hilda's cheek wore a glow of pardonable triumph. The great teacher had deigned to ask her assistance. "I judged by the analogy of Indian hemp," she answered. "This is clearly a similar, but much stronger, narcotic. Now, whenever I have given Indian hemp by your direction to people of sluggish, or even of merely bustling temperament, I have noticed that small doses produce serious effects, and that the after-results are most undesirable. But when you have prescribed the hemp

for nervous, overstrung, imaginative people, I have observed that they can stand large amounts of the tincture without evil results, and that the after-effects pass off rapidly. I who am mercurial in temperament, for example, can take any amount of Indian hemp without being made ill by it; while ten drops will send some slow and torpid rustics mad drunk with excitement—drive them into homicidal mania."

Sebastian nodded his head. He needed no more explanation. "You have hit it," he said. "I see it at a glance. The old antithesis! All men and all animals fall, roughly speaking, into two great divisions of type: the impassioned and the unimpassioned; the vivid and the phlegmatic. I catch your drift now. Lethodyne is poison to phlegmatic patients, who have not active power enough to wake up from it unhurt; it is relatively harmless to the vivid and impassioned, who can be put asleep by it, indeed, for a few hours more or less, but are alive enough to live on through the coma and reassert their vitality after it."

I recognised as he spoke that this explanation was correct. The dull rabbits, the sleepy Persian cats, and the silly sheep had died outright of lethodyne; the cunning, inquisitive raccoon, the quick hawk, and the active, intense-natured weasels, all most eager, wary, and alert animals, full of keenness and passion, had recovered quickly.

"Dare we try it on a human subject?" I asked, tentatively.

Hilda Wade answered at once, with that unerring rapidity of hers: "Yes, certainly; on a few—the right persons. *I*, for one, am not afraid to try it."

"You?" I cried, feeling suddenly aware how much I thought of her. "Oh, not YOU, please, Nurse Wade. Some other life, less valuable!"

Sebastian stared at me coldly. "Nurse Wade volunteers," he said. "It is in the cause of science. Who dares dissuade her? That tooth of yours? Ah, yes. Quite sufficient excuse. You wanted it out, Nurse Wade. Wells-Dinton shall operate."

Without a moment's hesitation, Hilda Wade sat down in an easy chair and took a measured dose of the new anaesthetic, proportioned to the average difference in weight between raccoons and humanity. My face displayed my anxiety, I suppose, for she turned to me, smiling with quiet confidence. "I know my own constitution," she said, with a reassuring glance that went straight to my heart. "I do not in the least fear."

As for Sebastian, he administered the drug to her as unconcernedly as if she were a rabbit. Sebastian's scientific coolness and calmness have long been the admiration of younger practitioners.

Wells-Dinton gave one wrench. The tooth came out as though the patient were a block of marble. There was not a cry or a movement, such as one notes when nitrous oxide is administered. Hilda Wade was to all appearance a mass of lifeless flesh. We stood round and watched. I was trembling with terror. Even on Sebastian's pale face, usually so unmoved, save by the watchful eagerness of scientific curiosity, I saw signs of anxiety.

After four hours of profound slumber—breath hovering, as it seemed, between life and death—she began to come to again. In half an hour more she was wide awake; she opened her eyes and asked for a glass of hock, with beef essence or oysters.

That evening, by six o'clock, she was quite well and able to go about her duties as usual.

"Sebastian is a wonderful man," I said to her, as I entered her ward on my rounds at night. "His coolness astonishes me. Do you know, he watched you all the time you were lying asleep there as if nothing were the matter."

"Coolness?" she inquired, in a quiet voice. "Or cruelty?"

"Cruelty?" I echoed, aghast. "Sebastian cruel! Oh, Nurse Wade, what an idea! Why, he has spent his whole life in striving against all odds to alleviate pain. He is the apostle of philanthropy!"

"Of philanthropy, or of science? To alleviate pain, or to learn the whole truth about the human body?"

"Come, come, now," I cried. "You analyse too far. I will not let even YOU put me out of conceit with Sebastian." (Her face flushed at that "even you"; I almost fancied she began to like me.) "He is the enthusiasm of my life; just consider how much he has done for humanity!"

She looked me through searchingly. "I will not destroy your illusion," she answered, after a pause. "It is a noble and generous one. But is it not largely based on an ascetic face, long white hair, and a moustache that hides the cruel corners of the mouth? For the corners ARE cruel. Some day, I will show you them. Cut off the long hair, shave the grizzled moustache—and what then will remain?" She drew a profile hastily. "Just that," and she showed it me. 'Twas a face like Robespierre's, grown harder and older and lined with observation. I recognised that it was in fact the essence of Sebastian.

Next day, as it turned out, the Professor himself insisted upon testing lethodyne in his own person. All Nat's strove to dissuade him. "Your life is so precious, sir—the advancement of science!" But the Professor was adamantine.

"Science can only be advanced if men of science will take their lives in their hands," he answered, sternly. "Besides, Nurse Wade has tried. Am I to lag behind a woman in my devotion to the cause of physiological knowledge?"

"Let him try," Hilda Wade murmured to me. "He is quite right. It will not hurt him. I have told him already he has just the proper temperament to stand the drug. Such people are rare: HE is one of them."

We administered the dose, trembling. Sebastian took it like a man, and dropped off instantly, for lethodyne is at least as instantaneous in its operation as nitrous oxide.

He lay long asleep. Hilda and I watched him.

After he had lain for some minutes senseless, like a log, on the couch where we had placed him, Hilda stooped over him quietly and lifted up the ends of the grizzled moustache. Then she pointed one accusing finger at his lips. "I told you so," she murmured, with a note of demonstration.

"There is certainly something rather stern, or even ruthless, about the set of the face and the firm ending of the lips," I admitted, reluctantly.

"That is why God gave men moustaches," she mused, in a low voice; "to hide the cruel corners of their mouths."

"Not ALWAYS cruel," I cried.

"Sometimes cruel, sometimes cunning, sometimes sensuous; but nine times out of ten best masked by moustaches."

"You have a bad opinion of our sex!" I exclaimed.

"Providence knew best," she answered. "IT gave you moustaches. That was in order that we women might be spared from always seeing you as you are. Besides, I said 'Nine times out of ten.' There are exceptions—SUCH exceptions!"

On second thought, I did not feel sure that I could quarrel with her estimate.

The experiment was that time once more successful. Sebastian woke up from the comatose state after eight hours, not quite as fresh as Hilda Wade, perhaps, but still tolerably alive; less alert, however, and complaining of dull headache. He was not hungry. Hilda Wade shook her head at that. "It will be of use only in a very few cases," she said to me, regretfully; "and those few will need to be carefully picked by an acute observer. I see resistance to the coma is, even more than I thought, a matter of temperament. Why, so impassioned a man as the Professor himself cannot entirely recover. With more sluggish temperaments, we shall have deeper difficulty."

"Would you call him impassioned?" I asked. "Most people think him so cold and stern."

She shook her head. "He is a snow-capped volcano!" she answered. "The fires of his life burn bright below. The exterior alone is cold and placid."

However, starting from that time, Sebastian began a course of experiments on patients, giving infinitesimal doses at first, and venturing slowly on somewhat larger quantities. But only in his own case and Hilda's could the result be called quite satisfactory. One dull and heavy, drink-sodden navvy,

to whom he administered no more than one-tenth of a grain, was drowsy for a week, and listless long after; while a fat washerwoman from West Ham, who took only two-tenths, fell so fast asleep, and snored so stertorously, that we feared she was going to doze off into eternity, after the fashion of the rabbits. Mothers of large families, we noted, stood the drug very ill; on pale young girls of the consumptive tendency its effect was not marked; but only a patient here and there, of exceptionally imaginative and vivid temperament, seemed able to endure it. Sebastian was discouraged. He saw the anaesthetic was not destined to fulfil his first enthusiastic humanitarian expectations. One day, while the investigation was just at this stage, a case was admitted into the observation-cots in which Hilda Wade took a particular interest. The patient was a young girl named Isabel Huntley—tall, dark, and slender, a markedly quick and imaginative type, with large black eyes which clearly bespoke a passionate nature. Though distinctly hysterical, she was pretty and pleasing. Her rich dark hair was as copious as it was beautiful. She held herself erect and had a finely poised head. From the first moment she arrived, I could see nurse Wade was strongly drawn towards her. Their souls sympathised. Number Fourteen—that is our impersonal way of describing CASES—was constantly on Hilda's lips. "I like the girl," she said once. "She is a lady in fibre."

"And a tobacco-trimmer by trade," Sebastian added, sarcastically.

As usual, Hilda's was the truer description. It went deeper.

Number Fourteen's ailment was a rare and peculiar one, into which I need not enter here with professional precision. (I have described the case fully for my brother practitioners in my paper in the fourth volume of Sebastian's Medical Miscellanies.) It will be enough for my present purpose to say, in brief, that the lesion consisted of an internal growth which is always dangerous and most often fatal, but which nevertheless is of such a character that, if it be once happily eradicated by supremely good surgery, it never tends to recur, and leaves the patient as strong and well as ever. Sebastian was, of course, delighted with the splendid opportunity thus afforded him. "It is a beautiful case!" he cried, with professional enthusiasm. "Beautiful! Beautiful! I never saw one so deadly or so malignant before. We are indeed in luck's way. Only a miracle can save her life. Cumberledge, we must proceed to perform the miracle."

Sebastian loved such cases. They formed his ideal. He did not greatly admire the artificial prolongation of diseased and unwholesome lives, which could never be of much use to their owners or anyone else; but when a chance occurred for restoring to perfect health a valuable existence which might otherwise be extinguished before its time, he positively revelled in his beneficent calling. "What nobler object can a man propose to himself," he used to say, "than to raise good men and true from the dead, as it were, and return them whole and sound to the family that depends upon them? Why, I had fifty times rather cure an honest coal-heaver of a wound in his leg than give ten years more lease of life to a gouty lord, diseased from top to toe, who expects to find a month of Carlsbad or Homburg once every year make up for eleven months of over-eating, over-drinking, vulgar debauchery, and under-thinking." He had no sympathy with men who lived the lives of swine: his heart was with the workers.

Of course, Hilda Wade soon suggested that, as an operation was absolutely necessary, Number Fourteen would be a splendid subject on whom to test once more the effects of lethodyne. Sebastian, with his head on one side, surveying the patient, promptly coincided. "Nervous diathesis," he observed. "Very vivid fancy. Twitches her hands the right way. Quick pulse, rapid perceptions, no meaningless unrest, but deep vitality. I don't doubt she'll stand it."

We explained to Number Fourteen the gravity of the case, and also the tentative character of the operation under lethodyne. At first, she shrank from taking it. "No, no!" she said; "let me die quietly." But Hilda, like the Angel of Mercy that she was, whispered in the girl's ear: "IF it succeeds, you will get quite well, and—you can marry Arthur."

The patient's dark face flushed crimson.

"Ah! Arthur," she cried. "Dear Arthur! I can bear anything you choose to do to me—for Arthur!"

"How soon you find these things out!" I cried to Hilda, a few minutes later. "A mere man would never have thought of that. And who is Arthur?"

"A sailor—on a ship that trades with the South Seas. I hope he is worthy of her. Fretting over Arthur's absence has aggravated the case. He is homeward-bound now. She is worrying herself to death for fear she should not live to say good-bye to him."

"She WILL live to marry him," I answered, with confidence like her own, "if YOU say she can stand it."

"The lethodyne—oh, yes; THAT'S all right. But the operation itself is so extremely dangerous; though Dr. Sebastian says he has called in the best surgeon in London for all such cases. They are rare, he tells me—and Nielsen has performed on six, three of them successfully."

We gave the girl the drug. She took it, trembling, and went off at once, holding Hilda's hand, with a pale smile on her face, which persisted there somewhat weirdly all through the operation. The work of removing the growth was long and ghastly, even for us who were well seasoned to such sights; but at the end Nielsen expressed himself as perfectly satisfied. "A very neat piece of work!" Sebastian exclaimed, looking on. "I congratulate you, Nielsen. I never saw anything done cleaner or better."

"A successful operation, certainly!" the great surgeon admitted, with just pride in the Master's commendation.

"AND the patient?" Hilda asked, wavering.

"Oh, the patient? The patient will die," Nielsen replied, in an unconcerned voice, wiping his spotless instruments.

"That is not MY idea of the medical art," I cried, shocked at his callousness. "An operation is only successful if—"

He regarded me with lofty scorn. "A certain percentage of losses," he interrupted, calmly, "is inevitable, of course, in all surgical operations. We are obliged to average it. How could I preserve my precision and accuracy of hand if I were always bothered by sentimental considerations of the patient's safety?"

Hilda Wade looked up at me with a sympathetic glance. "We will pull her through yet," she murmured, in her soft voice, "if care and skill can do it,—MY care and YOUR skill. This is now OUR patient, Dr. Cumberledge."

It needed care and skill. We watched her for hours, and she showed no sign or gleam of recovery. Her sleep was deeper than either Sebastian's or Hilda's had been. She had taken a big dose, so as to secure immobility. The question now was, would she recover at all from it? Hour after hour we waited and watched; and not a sign of movement! Only the same deep, slow, hampered breathing, the same feeble, jerky pulse, the same deathly pallor on the dark cheeks, the same corpse-like rigidity of limb and muscle.

At last our patient stirred faintly, as in a dream; her breath faltered. We bent over her. Was it death, or was she beginning to recover?

Very slowly, a faint trace of colour came back to her cheeks. Her heavy eyes half opened. They stared first with a white stare. Her arms dropped by her side. Her mouth relaxed its ghastly smile.... We held our breath.... She was coming to again!

But her coming to was slow—very, very slow. Her pulse was still weak. Her heart pumped feebly. We feared she might sink from inanition at any moment. Hilda Wade knelt on the floor by the girl's side and held a spoonful of beef essence coaxingly to her lips. Number Fourteen gasped, drew a long, slow breath, then gulped and swallowed it. After that she lay back with her mouth open, looking like a corpse. Hilda pressed another spoonful of the soft jelly upon her; but the girl waved it away with one trembling hand. "Let me die," she cried. "Let me die! I feel dead already."

Hilda held her face close. "Isabel," she whispered—and I recognised in her tone the vast moral difference between "Isabel" and "Number Fourteen,"—"Is-a-bel, you must take it. For Arthur's sake, I say, you MUST take it."

The girl's hand quivered as it lay on the white coverlet. "For Arthur's sake!" she murmured, lifting her eyelids dreamily. "For Arthur's sake! Yes, nurse, dear!"

"Call me Hilda, please! Hilda!"

The girl's face lighted up again. "Yes, Hilda, dear," she answered, in an unearthly voice, like one raised from the dead. "I will call you what you will. Angel of light, you have been so good to me."

She opened her lips with an effort and slowly swallowed another spoonful. Then she fell back, exhausted. But her pulse improved within twenty minutes. I mentioned the matter, with enthusiasm, to Sebastian later. "It is very nice in its way," he answered; "but… it is not nursing."

I thought to myself that that was just what it WAS; but I did not say so. Sebastian was a man who thought meanly of women. "A doctor, like a priest," he used to declare, "should keep himself unmarried. His bride is medicine." And he disliked to see what he called PHILANDERING going on in his hospital. It may have been on that account that I avoided speaking much of Hilda Wade thenceforth before him.

He looked in casually next day to see the patient. "She will die," he said, with perfect assurance, as we passed down the ward together. "Operation has taken too much out of her."

"Still, she has great recuperative powers," Hilda answered. "They all have in her family, Professor. You may, perhaps, remember Joseph Huntley, who occupied Number Sixty-seven in the Accident Ward, some nine months since—compound fracture of the arm—a dark, nervous engineer's assistant—very hard to restrain—well, HE was her brother; he caught typhoid fever in the hospital, and you commented at the time on his strange vitality. Then there was her cousin, again, Ellen Stubbs. We had HER for stubborn chronic laryngitis—a very bad case—anyone else would have died—yielded at once to your treatment; and made, I recollect, a splendid convalescence."

"What a memory you have!" Sebastian cried, admiring against his will. "It is simply marvellous! I never saw anyone like you in my life… except once. HE was a man, a doctor, a colleague of mine—dead long ago.... Why—" he mused, and gazed hard at her. Hilda shrank before his gaze. "This is curious," he went on slowly, at last; "very curious. You—why, you resemble him!"

"Do I?" Hilda replied, with forced calm, raising her eyes to his. Their glances met. That moment, I saw each had recognised something; and from that day forth I was instinctively aware that a duel was being waged between Sebastian and Hilda,—a duel between the two ablest and most singular personalities I had ever met; a duel of life and death—though I did not fully understand its purport till much, much later.

Every day after that, the poor, wasted girl in Number Fourteen grew feebler and fainter. Her temperature rose; her heart throbbed weakly. She seemed to be fading away. Sebastian shook his head. "Lethodyne is a failure," he said, with a mournful regret. "One cannot trust it. The case might have recovered from the operation, or recovered from the drug; but she could not recover from both together. Yet the operation would have been impossible without the drug, and the drug is useless except for the operation."

It was a great disappointment to him. He hid himself in his room, as was his wont when disappointed, and went on with his old work at his beloved microbes.

"I have one hope still," Hilda murmured to me by the bedside, when our patient was at her worst. "If one contingency occurs, I believe we may save her."

"What is that?" I asked.

She shook her head waywardly. "You must wait and see," she answered. "If it comes off, I will tell you. If not, let it swell the limbo of lost inspirations."

Next morning early, however, she came up to me with a radiant face, holding a newspaper in her hand. “Well, it HAS happened!” she cried, rejoicing. “We shall save poor Isabel Number Fourteen, I mean; our way is clear, Dr. Cumberledge.”

I followed her blindly to the bedside, little guessing what she could mean. She knelt down at the head of the cot. The girl’s eyes were closed. I touched her cheek; she was in a high fever. “Temperature?” I asked.

“A hundred and three.”

I shook my head. Every symptom of fatal relapse. I could not imagine what card Hilda held in reserve. But I stood there, waiting.

She whispered in the girl’s ear: “Arthur’s ship is sighted off the Lizard.”

The patient opened her eyes slowly, and rolled them for a moment as if she did not understand.

“Too late!” I cried. “Too late! She is delirious—insensible!”

Hilda repeated the words slowly, but very distinctly. “Do you hear, dear? Arthur’s ship… it is sighted.... Arthur’s ship… at the Lizard.”

The girl’s lips moved. “Arthur! Arthur!… Arthur’s ship!” A deep sigh. She clenched her hands. “He is coming?” Hilda nodded and smiled, holding her breath with suspense.

“Up the Channel now. He will be at Southampton tonight. Arthur… at Southampton. It is here, in the papers; I have telegraphed to him to hurry on at once to see you.”

She struggled up for a second. A smile flitted across the worn face. Then she fell back wearily.

I thought all was over. Her eyes stared white. But ten minutes later she opened her lids again. “Arthur is coming,” she murmured. “Arthur… coming.”

“Yes, dear. Now sleep. He is coming.”

All through that day and the next night she was restless and agitated; but still her pulse improved a little. Next morning she was again a trifle better. Temperature falling—a hundred and one, point three. At ten o’clock Hilda came in to her, radiant.

“Well, Isabel, dear,” she cried, bending down and touching her cheek (kissing is forbidden by the rules of the house), “Arthur has come. He is here… down below… I have seen him.”

“Seen him!” the girl gasped.

“Yes, seen him. Talked with him. Such a nice, manly fellow; and such an honest, good face! He is longing for you to get well. He says he has come home this time to marry you.”

The wan lips quivered. “He will NEVER marry me!”

“Yes, yes, he WILL—if you will take this jelly. Look here—he wrote these words to you before my very eyes: ‘Dear love to my Isa!’… If you are good, and will sleep, he may see you—to-morrow.”

The girl opened her lips and ate the jelly greedily. She ate as much as she was desired. In three minutes more her head had fallen like a child’s upon her pillow and she was sleeping peacefully.

I went up to Sebastian’s room, quite excited with the news. He was busy among his bacilli. They were his hobby, his pets. “Well, what do you think, Professor?” I cried. “That patient of Nurse Wade’s—”

He gazed up at me abstractedly, his brow contracting. “Yes, yes; I know,” he interrupted. “The girl in Fourteen. I have discounted her case long ago. She has ceased to interest me.... Dead, of course! Nothing else was possible.”

I laughed a quick little laugh of triumph. “No, sir; NOT dead. Recovering! She has fallen just now into a normal sleep; her breathing is natural.”

He wheeled his revolving chair away from the germs and fixed me with his keen eyes. “Recovering?” he echoed. “Impossible! Rallying, you mean. A mere flicker. I know my trade. She MUST die this evening.”

“Forgive my persistence,” I replied; “but—her temperature has gone down to ninety-nine and a trifle.”

He pushed away the bacilli in the nearest watch-glass quite angrily. “To ninety-nine!” he exclaimed, knitting his brows. “Cumberledge, this is disgraceful! A most disappointing case! A most provoking patient!”

“But surely, sir—” I cried.

“Don’t talk to ME, boy! Don’t attempt to apologise for her. Such conduct is unpardonable. She OUGHT to have died. It was her clear duty. I SAID she would die, and she should have known better than to fly in the face of the faculty. Her recovery is an insult to medical science. What is the staff about? Nurse Wade should have prevented it.”

“Still, sir,” I exclaimed, trying to touch him on a tender spot, “the anaesthetic, you know! Such a triumph for lethodyne! This case shows clearly that on certain constitutions it may be used with advantage under certain conditions.”

He snapped his fingers. “Lethodyne! pooh! I have lost interest in it. Impracticable! It is not fitted for the human species.”

“Why so? Number Fourteen proves—”

He interrupted me with an impatient wave of his hand; then he rose and paced up and down the room testily. After a pause, he spoke again. “The weak point of lethodyne is this: nobody can be trusted to say WHEN it may be used—except Nurse Wade,—which is NOT science.”

For the first time in my life, I had a glimmering idea that I distrusted Sebastian. Hilda Wade was right—the man was cruel. But I had never observed his cruelty before—because his devotion to science had blinded me to it.

CHAPTER II
THE EPISODE OF THE GENTLEMAN WHO HAD FAILED FOR EVERYTHING

One day, about those times, I went round to call on my aunt, Lady Tepping. And lest you accuse me of the vulgar desire to flaunt my fine relations in your face, I hasten to add that my poor dear old aunt is a very ordinary specimen of the common Army widow. Her husband, Sir Malcolm, a crusty old gentleman of the ancient school, was knighted in Burma, or thereabouts, for a successful raid upon naked natives, on something that is called the Shan frontier. When he had grown grey in the service of his Queen and country, besides earning himself incidentally a very decent pension, he acquired gout and went to his long rest in Kensal Green Cemetery. He left his wife with one daughter, and the only pretence to a title in our otherwise blameless family.

My cousin Daphne is a very pretty girl, with those quiet, sedate manners which often develop later in life into genuine self-respect and real depth of character. Fools do not admire her; they accuse her of being "heavy." But she can do without fools; she has a fine, strongly built figure, an upright carriage, a large and broad forehead, a firm chin, and features which, though well-marked and well-moulded, are yet delicate in outline and sensitive in expression. Very young men seldom take to Daphne: she lacks the desired inanity. But she has mind, repose, and womanly tenderness. Indeed, if she had not been my cousin, I almost think I might once have been tempted to fall in love with her.

When I reached Gloucester Terrace, on this particular afternoon, I found Hilda Wade there before me. She had lunched at my aunt's, in fact. It was her "day out" at St. Nathaniel's, and she had come round to spend it with Daphne Tepping. I had introduced her to the house some time before, and she and my cousin had struck up a close acquaintance immediately. Their temperaments were sympathetic; Daphne admired Hilda's depth and reserve, while Hilda admired Daphne's grave grace and self-control, her perfect freedom from current affectations. She neither giggled nor aped Ibsenism.

A third person stood back in the room when I entered—a tall and somewhat jerry-built young man, with a rather long and solemn face, like an early stage in the evolution of a Don Quixote. I took a good look at him. There was something about his air that impressed me as both lugubrious and humorous; and in this I was right, for I learned later that he was one of those rare people who can sing a comic song with immense success while preserving a sour countenance, like a Puritan preacher's. His eyes were a little sunken, his fingers long and nervous; but I fancied he looked a good fellow at heart, for all that, though foolishly impulsive. He was a punctilious gentleman, I felt sure; his face and manner grew upon one rapidly.

Daphne rose as I entered, and waved the stranger forward with an imperious little wave. I imagined, indeed, that I detected in the gesture a faint touch of half-unconscious proprietorship. "Good-morning, Hubert," she said, taking my hand, but turning towards the tall young man. "I don't think you know Mr. Cecil Holsworthy."

"I have heard you speak of him," I answered, drinking him in with my glance. I added internally, "Not half good enough for you."

Hilda's eyes met mine and read my thought. They flashed back word, in the language of eyes, "I do not agree with you."

Daphne, meanwhile, was watching me closely. I could see she was anxious to discover what impression her friend Mr. Holsworthy was making on me. Till then, I had no idea she was fond of anyone in particular; but the way her glance wandered from him to me and from me to Hilda showed clearly that she thought much of this gawky visitor.

We sat and talked together, we four, for some time. I found the young man with the lugubrious countenance improved immensely on closer acquaintance. His talk was clever. He turned out to be the son of a politician high in office in the Canadian Government, and he had been educated at Oxford. The father, I gathered, was rich, but he himself was making an income of nothing a year just then as a briefless barrister, and he was hesitating whether to accept a post of secretary that had been offered him in the colony, or to continue his negative career at the Inner Temple, for the honour and glory of it.

"Now, which would YOU advise me, Miss Tepping?" he inquired, after we had discussed the matter some minutes.

Daphne's face flushed up. "It is so hard to decide," she answered. "To decide to YOUR best advantage, I mean, of course. For naturally all your English friends would wish to keep you as long as possible in England."

"No, do you think so?" the gawky young man jerked out with evident pleasure. "Now, that's awfully kind of you. Do you know, if YOU tell me I ought to stay in England, I've half a mind… I'll cable over this very day and refuse the appointment."

Daphne flushed once more. "Oh, please don't!" she exclaimed, looking frightened. "I shall be quite distressed if a stray word of mine should debar you from accepting a good offer of a secretaryship."

"Why, your least wish—" the young man began—then checked himself hastily—"must be always important," he went on, in a different voice, "to everyone of your acquaintance."

Daphne rose hurriedly. "Look here, Hilda," she said, a little tremulously, biting her lip, "I have to go out into Westbourne Grove to get those gloves for to-night, and a spray for my hair; will you excuse me for half an hour?"

Holsworthy rose too. "Mayn't I go with you?" he asked, eagerly.

"Oh, if you like. How very kind of you!" Daphne answered, her cheek a blush rose. "Hubert, will you come too? and you, Hilda?"

It was one of those invitations which are given to be refused. I did not need Hilda's warning glance to tell me that my company would be quite superfluous. I felt those two were best left together.

"It's no use, though, Dr. Cumberledge!" Hilda put in, as soon as they were gone. "He WON'T propose, though he has had every encouragement. I don't know what's the matter; but I've been watching them both for weeks, and somehow things seem never to get any forwarder."

"You think he's in love with her?" I asked.

"In love with her! Well, you have eyes in your head, I know; where could they have been looking? He's madly in love—a very good kind of love, too. He genuinely admires and respects and appreciates all Daphne's sweet and charming qualities."

"Then what do you suppose is the matter?"

"I have an inkling of the truth: I imagine Mr. Cecil must have let himself in for a prior attachment."

"If so, why does he hang about Daphne?"

"Because—he can't help himself. He's a good fellow and a chivalrous fellow. He admires your cousin; but he must have got himself into some foolish entanglement elsewhere which he is too honourable to break off; while at the same time he's far too much impressed by Daphne's fine qualities to be able to keep away from her. It's the ordinary case of love versus duty."

"Is he well off? Could he afford to marry Daphne?"

"Oh, his father's very rich: he has plenty of money; a Canadian millionaire, they say. That makes it all the likelier that some undesirable young woman somewhere may have managed to get hold of him. Just the sort of romantic, impressionable hobbledehoy such women angle for."

I drummed my fingers on the table. Presently Hilda spoke again. "Why don't you try to get to know him, and find out precisely what's the matter?"

"I KNOW what's the matter—now you've told me," I answered. "It's as clear as day. Daphne is very much smitten with him, too. I'm sorry for Daphne! Well, I'll take your advice; I'll try to have some talk with him."

"Do, please; I feel sure I have hit upon it. He has got himself engaged in a hurry to some girl he doesn't really care about, and he is far too much of a gentleman to break it off, though he's in love quite another way with Daphne."

Just at that moment the door opened and my aunt entered.

"Why, where's Daphne?" she cried, looking about her and arranging her black lace shawl.

"She has just run out into Westbourne Grove to get some gloves and a flower for the fete this evening," Hilda answered. Then she added, significantly, "Mr. Holsworthy has gone with her."

"What? That boy's been here again?"

"Yes, Lady Tepping. He called to see Daphne."

My aunt turned to me with an aggrieved tone. It is a peculiarity of my aunt's—I have met it elsewhere—that if she is angry with Jones, and Jones is not present, she assumes a tone of injured asperity on his account towards Brown or Smith, or any other innocent person whom she happens to be addressing. "Now, this is really too bad, Hubert," she burst out, as if *I* were the culprit. "Disgraceful! Abominable! I'm sure I can't make out what the young fellow means by it. Here he comes dangling after Daphne every day and all day long—and never once says whether he means anything by it or not. In MY young days, such conduct as that would not have been considered respectable."

I nodded and beamed benignly.

"Well, why don't you answer me?" my aunt went on, warming up. "DO you mean to tell me you think his behaviour respectful to a nice girl in Daphne's position?"

"My dear aunt," I answered, "you confound the persons. I am not Mr. Holsworthy. I decline responsibility for him. I meet him here, in YOUR house, for the first time this morning."

"Then that shows how often you come to see your relations, Hubert!" my aunt burst out, obliquely. "The man's been here, to my certain knowledge, every day this six weeks."

"Really, Aunt Fanny," I said; "you must recollect that a professional man—"

"Oh, yes. THAT'S the way! Lay it all down to your profession, do, Hubert! Though I KNOW you were at the Thorntons' on Saturday—saw it in the papers—the Morning Post—'among the guests were Sir Edward and Lady Burnes, Professor Sebastian, Dr. Hubert Cumberledge,' and so forth, and so forth. YOU think you can conceal these things; but you can't. I get to know them!"

"Conceal them! My dearest aunt! Why, I danced twice with Daphne."

"Daphne! Yes, Daphne. They all run after Daphne," my aunt exclaimed, altering the venue once more. "But there's no respect for age left. *I* expect to be neglected. However, that's neither here nor there. The point is this: you're the one man now living in the family. You ought to behave like a brother to Daphne. Why don't you board this Holsworthy person and ask him his intentions?"

"Goodness gracious!" I cried; "most excellent of aunts, that epoch has gone past. The late lamented Queen Anne is now dead. It's no use asking the young man of to-day to explain his intentions. He will refer you to the works of the Scandinavian dramatists."

My aunt was speechless. She could only gurgle out the words: "Well, I can safely say that of all the monstrous behaviour—" then language failed her and she relapsed into silence.

However, when Daphne and young Holsworthy returned, I had as much talk with him as I could, and when he left the house I left also.

"Which way are you walking?" I asked, as we turned out into the street.

"Towards my rooms in the Temple."

"Oh! I'm going back to St. Nathaniel's," I continued. "If you'll allow me, I'll walk part way with you."

"How very kind of you!"

We strode side by side a little distance in silence. Then a thought seemed to strike the lugubrious young man. “What a charming girl your cousin is!” he exclaimed, abruptly.

“You seem to think so,” I answered, smiling.

He flushed a little; the lantern jaw grew longer. “I admire her, of course,” he answered. “Who doesn’t? She is so extraordinarily handsome.”

“Well, not exactly handsome,” I replied, with more critical and kinsman-like deliberation. “Pretty, if you will; and decidedly pleasing and attractive in manner.”

He looked me up and down, as if he found me a person singularly deficient in taste and appreciation. “Ah, but then, you are her cousin,” he said at last, with a compassionate tone. “That makes a difference.”

“I quite see all Daphne’s strong points,” I answered, still smiling, for I could perceive he was very far gone. “She is good-looking, and she is clever.”

“Clever!” he echoed. “Profound! She has a most unusual intellect. She stands alone.”

“Like her mother’s silk dresses,” I murmured, half under my breath.

He took no notice of my flippant remark, but went on with his rhapsody. “Such depth; such penetration! And then, how sympathetic! Why, even to a mere casual acquaintance like myself, she is so kind, so discerning!”

“ARE you such a casual acquaintance?” I inquired, with a smile. (It might have shocked Aunt Fanny to hear me; but THAT is the way we ask a young man his intentions nowadays.)

He stopped short and hesitated. “Oh, quite casual,” he replied, almost stammering. “Most casual, I assure you.... I have never ventured to do myself the honour of supposing that… that Miss Tepping could possibly care for me.”

“There is such a thing as being TOO modest and unassuming,” I answered. “It sometimes leads to unintentional cruelty.”

“No, do you think so?” he cried, his face falling all at once. “I should blame myself bitterly if that were so. Dr. Cumberledge, you are her cousin. DO you gather that I have acted in such a way as to—to lead Miss Tepping to suppose I felt any affection for her?”

I laughed in his face. “My dear boy,” I answered, laying one hand on his shoulder, “may I say the plain truth? A blind bat could see you are madly in love with her.”

His mouth twitched. “That’s very serious!” he answered, gravely; “very serious.”

“It is,” I responded, with my best paternal manner, gazing blankly in front of me.

He stopped short again. “Look here,” he said, facing me. “Are you busy? No? Then come back with me to my rooms; and—I’ll make a clean breast of it.”

“By all means,” I assented. “When one is young—and foolish—I have often noticed, as a medical man, that a drachm of clean breast is a magnificent prescription.”

He walked back by my side, talking all the way of Daphne’s many adorable qualities. He exhausted the dictionary for laudatory adjectives. By the time I reached his door it was not HIS fault if I had not learned that the angelic hierarchy were not in the running with my pretty cousin for graces and virtues. I felt that Faith, Hope, and Charity ought to resign at once in favour of Miss Daphne Tepping, promoted.

He took me into his comfortably furnished rooms—the luxurious rooms of a rich young bachelor, with taste as well as money—and offered me a partaga. Now, I have long observed, in the course of my practice, that a choice cigar assists a man in taking a philosophic outlook on the question under discussion; so I accepted the partaga. He sat down opposite me and pointed to a photograph in the centre of his mantlepiece. “I am engaged to that lady,” he put in, shortly.

“So I anticipated,” I answered, lighting up.

He started and looked surprised. “Why, what made you guess it?” he inquired.

I smiled the calm smile of superior age—I was some eight years or so his senior. “My dear fellow,” I murmured, “what else could prevent you from proposing to Daphne—when you are so undeniably in love with her?”

“A great deal,” he answered. “For example, the sense of my own utter unworthiness.”

“One’s own unworthiness,” I replied, “though doubtless real—p’f, p’f—is a barrier that most of us can readily get over when our admiration for a particular lady waxes strong enough. So THIS is the prior attachment!” I took the portrait down and scanned it.

“Unfortunately, yes. What do you think of her?”

I scrutinised the features. “Seems a nice enough little thing,” I answered. It was an innocent face, I admit; very frank and girlish.

He leaned forward eagerly. “That’s just it. A nice enough little thing! Nothing in the world to be said against her. While Daphne—Miss Tepping, I mean—” His silence was ecstatic.

I examined the photograph still more closely. It displayed a lady of twenty or thereabouts, with a weak face, small, vacant features, a feeble chin, a good-humoured, simple mouth, and a wealth of golden hair that seemed to strike a keynote.

“In the theatrical profession?” I inquired at last, looking up.

He hesitated. “Well, not exactly,” he answered.

I pursed my lips and blew a ring. “Music-hall stage?” I went on, dubiously.

He nodded. “But a girl is not necessarily any the less a lady because she sings at a music-hall,” he added, with warmth, displaying an evident desire to be just to his betrothed, however much he admired Daphne.

“Certainly not,” I admitted. “A lady is a lady; no occupation can in itself unladify her.... But on the music-hall stage, the odds, one must admit, are on the whole against her.”

“Now, THERE you show prejudice!”

“One may be quite unprejudiced,” I answered, “and yet allow that connection with the music-halls does not, as such, afford clear proof that a girl is a compound of all the virtues.”

“I think she’s a good girl,” he retorted, slowly.

“Then why do you want to throw her over?” I inquired.

“I don’t. That’s just it. On the contrary, I mean to keep my word and marry her.”

“IN ORDER to keep your word?” I suggested.

He nodded. “Precisely. It is a point of honour.”

“That’s a poor ground of marriage,” I went on. “Mind, I don’t want for a moment to influence you, as Daphne’s cousin. I want to get at the truth of the situation. I don’t even know what Daphne thinks of you. But you promised me a clean breast. Be a man and bare it.”

He bared it instantly. “I thought I was in love with this girl, you see,” he went on, “till I saw Miss Tepping.”

“That makes a difference,” I admitted.

“And I couldn’t bear to break her heart.”

“Heaven forbid!” I cried. “It is the one unpardonable sin. Better anything than that.” Then I grew practical. “Father’s consent?”

“MY father’s? IS it likely? He expects me to marry into some distinguished English family.”

I hummed a moment. “Well, out with it!” I exclaimed, pointing my cigar at him.

He leaned back in his chair and told me the whole story. A pretty girl; golden hair; introduced to her by a friend; nice, simple little thing; mind and heart above the irregular stage on to which she had been driven by poverty alone; father dead; mother in reduced circumstances. “To keep the home together, poor Sissie decided—”

“Precisely so,” I murmured, knocking off my ash. “The usual self-sacrifice! Case quite normal! Everything en regle!”

"You don't mean to say you doubt it?" he cried, flushing up, and evidently regarding me as a hopeless cynic. "I do assure you, Dr. Cumberledge, the poor child—though miles, of course, below Miss Tepping's level—is as innocent, and as good—"

"As a flower in May. Oh, yes; I don't doubt it. How did you come to propose to her, though?"

He reddened a little. "Well, it was almost accidental," he said, sheepishly. "I called there one evening, and her mother had a headache and went up to bed. And when we two were left alone, Sissie talked a great deal about her future and how hard her life was. And after a while she broke down and began to cry. And then—"

I cut him short with a wave of my hand. "You need say no more," I put in, with a sympathetic face. "We have all been there."

We paused a moment, while I puffed smoke at the photograph again. "Well," I said at last, "her face looks to me really simple and nice. It is a good face. Do you see her often?"

"Oh, no; she's on tour."

"In the provinces?"

"M'yes; just at present, at Scarborough."

"But she writes to you?"

"Every day."

"Would you think it an unpardonable impertinence if I made bold to ask whether it would be possible for you to show me a specimen of her letters?"

He unlocked a drawer and took out three or four. Then he read one through, carefully. "I don't think," he said, in a deliberative voice, "it would be a serious breach of confidence in me to let you look through this one. There's really nothing in it, you know—just the ordinary average every-day love-letter."

I glanced through the little note. He was right. The conventional hearts and darts epistle. It sounded nice enough: "Longing to see you again; so lonely in this place; your dear sweet letter; looking forward to the time; your ever-devoted Sissie."

"That seems straight," I answered. "However, I am not quite sure. Will you allow me to take it away, with the photograph? I know I am asking much. I want to show it to a lady in whose tact and discrimination I have the greatest confidence."

"What, Daphne?"

I smiled. "No, not Daphne," I answered. "Our friend, Miss Wade. She has extraordinary insight."

"I could trust anything to Miss Wade. She is true as steel."

"You are right," I answered. "That shows that you, too, are a judge of character."

He hesitated. "I feel a brute," he cried, "to go on writing every day to Sissie Montague—and yet calling every day to see Miss Tepping. But still—I do it."

I grasped his hand. "My dear fellow," I said, "nearly ninety per cent. of men, after all—are human!"

I took both letter and photograph back with me to Nathaniel's. When I had gone my rounds that night, I carried them into Hilda Wade's room and told her the story. Her face grew grave. "We must be just," she said at last. "Daphne is deeply in love with him; but even for Daphne's sake, we must not take anything for granted against the other lady."

I produced the photograph. "What do you make of that?" I asked. "*I* think it an honest face, myself, I may tell you."

She scrutinised it long and closely with a magnifier. Then she put her head on one side and mused very deliberately. "Madeline Shaw gave me her photograph the other day, and said to me, as she gave it, 'I do so like these modern portraits; they show one WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.'"

"You mean they are so much touched up!"

"Exactly. That, as it stands, is a sweet, innocent face—an honest girl's face—almost babyish in its transparency but… the innocence has all been put into it by the photographer."

"You think so?"

"I know it. Look here at those lines just visible on the cheek. They disappear, nowhere, at impossible angles. AND the corners of that mouth. They couldn't go so, with that nose and those puckers. The thing is not real. It has been atrociously edited. Part is nature's; part, the photographer's; part, even possibly paint and powder."

"But the underlying face?"

"Is a minx's."

I handed her the letter. "This next?" I asked, fixing my eyes on her as she looked.

She read it through. For a minute or two she examined it. "The letter is right enough," she answered, after a second reading, "though its guileless simplicity is, perhaps, under the circumstances, just a leetle overdone; but the handwriting—the handwriting is duplicity itself: a cunning, serpentine hand, no openness or honesty in it. Depend upon it, that girl is playing a double game."

"You believe, then, there is character in handwriting?"

"Undoubtedly; when we know the character, we can see it in the writing. The difficulty is, to see it and read it BEFORE we know it; and I have practised a little at that. There is character in all we do, of course—our walk, our cough, the very wave of our hands; the only secret is, not all of us have always skill to see it. Here, however, I feel pretty sure. The curls of the g's and the tails of the y's—how full they are of wile, of low, underhand trickery!"

I looked at them as she pointed. "That is true!" I exclaimed. "I see it when you show it. Lines meant for effect. No straightness or directness in them!"

Hilda reflected a moment. "Poor Daphne!" she murmured. "I would do anything to help her.... I'll tell what might be a good plan." Her face brightened. "My holiday comes next week. I'll run down to Scarborough—it's as nice a place for a holiday as any—and I'll observe this young lady. It can do no harm—and good may come of it."

"How kind of you!" I cried. "But you are always all kindness."

Hilda went to Scarborough, and came back again for a week before going on to Bruges, where she proposed to spend the greater part of her holidays. She stopped a night or two in town to report progress, and, finding another nurse ill, promised to fill her place till a substitute was forthcoming.

"Well, Dr. Cumberledge," she said, when she saw me alone, "I was right! I have found out a fact or two about Daphne's rival!"

"You have seen her?" I asked.

"Seen her? I have stopped for a week in the same house. A very nice lodging-house on the Spa front, too. The girl's well enough off. The poverty plea fails. She goes about in good rooms and carries a mother with her."

"That's well," I answered. "That looks all right."

"Oh, yes, she's quite presentable: has the manners of a lady whenever she chooses. But the chief point is this: she laid her letters every day on the table in the passage outside her door for post—laid them all in a row, so that when one claimed one's own one couldn't help seeing them."

"Well, that was open and aboveboard," I continued, beginning to fear we had hastily misjudged Miss Sissie Montague.

"Very open—too much so, in fact; for I was obliged to note the fact that she wrote two letters regularly every day of her life—'to my two mashes,' she explained one afternoon to a young man who was with her as she laid them on the table. One of them was always addressed to Cecil Holsworthy, Esq."

"And the other?"

"Wasn't."

"Did you note the name?" I asked, interested.

"Yes; here it is." She handed me a slip of paper.

I read it: "Reginald Nettlecraft, Esq., 427, Staples Inn, London."

"What, Reggie Nettlecraft!" I cried, amused. "Why, he was a very little boy at Charterhouse when I was a big one; he afterwards went to Oxford, and got sent down from Christ Church for the part he took in burning a Greek bust in Tom Quad—an antique Greek bust—after a bump supper."

"Just the sort of man I should have expected," Hilda answered, with a suppressed smile. "I have a sort of inkling that Miss Montague likes HIM best; he is nearer her type; but she thinks Cecil Holsworthy the better match. Has Mr. Nettlecraft money?"

"Not a penny, I should say. An allowance from his father, perhaps, who is a Lincolnshire parson; but otherwise, nothing."

"Then, in my opinion, the young lady is playing for Mr. Holsworthy's money; failing which, she will decline upon Mr. Nettlecraft's heart."

We talked it all over. In the end I said abruptly: "Nurse Wade, you have seen Miss Montague, or whatever she calls herself. I have not. I won't condemn her unheard. I have half a mind to run down one day next week to Scarborough and have a look at her."

"Do. That will suffice. You can judge then for yourself whether or not I am mistaken."

I went; and what is more, I heard Miss Sissie sing at her hall—a pretty domestic song, most childish and charming. She impressed me not unfavourably, in spite of what Hilda said. Her peach-blossom cheek might have been art, but looked like nature. She had an open face, a baby smile and there was a frank girlishness about her dress and manner that took my fancy. "After all," I thought to myself, "even Hilda Wade is fallible."

So that evening, when her "turn" was over, I made up my mind to go round and call upon her. I had told Cecil Holsworthy my intentions beforehand, and it rather shocked him. He was too much of a gentleman to wish to spy upon the girl he had promised to marry. However, in my case, there need be no such scruples. I found the house and asked for Miss Montague. As I mounted the stairs to the drawing-room floor, I heard a sound of voices—the murmur of laughter; idiotic guffaws, suppressed giggles, the masculine and feminine varieties of tomfoolery.

"YOU'D make a splendid woman of business, YOU would!" a young man was saying. I gathered from his drawl that he belonged to that sub-species of the human race which is known as the Chappie.

"Wouldn't I just?" a girl's voice answered, tittering. I recognised it as Sissie's. "You ought to see me at it! Why, my brother set up a place once for mending bicycles; and I used to stand about at the door, as if I had just returned from a ride; and when fellows came in, with a nut loose or something, I'd begin talking with them while Bertie tightened it. Then, when THEY weren't looking, I'd dab the business end of a darning-needle, so, just plump into their tires; and of course, as soon as they went off, they were back again in a minute to get a puncture mended! I call THAT business."

A roar of laughter greeted the recital of this brilliant incident in a commercial career. As it subsided, I entered. There were two men in the room, besides Miss Montague and her mother, and a second young lady.

"Excuse this late call," I said, quietly, bowing. "But I have only one night in Scarborough, Miss Montague, and I wanted to see you. I'm a friend of Mr. Holsworthy's. I told him I'd look you up, and this is my sole opportunity."

I FELT rather than saw that Miss Montague darted a quick glance of hidden meaning at her friends the chappies; their faces, in response, ceased to snigger and grew instantly sober.

She took my card; then, in her alternative manner as the perfect lady, she presented me to her mother. "Dr. Cumberledge, mamma," she said, in a faintly warning voice. "A friend of Mr. Holsworthy's."

The old lady half rose. "Let me see," she said, staring at me. "WHICH is Mr. Holsworthy, Siss? —is it Cecil or Reggie?"

One of the chappies burst into a fatuous laugh once more at this remark. “Now, you’re giving away the whole show, Mrs. Montague!” he exclaimed, with a chuckle. A look from Miss Sissie immediately checked him.

I am bound to admit, however, that after these untoward incidents of the first minute, Miss Montague and her friends behaved throughout with distinguished propriety. Her manners were perfect —I may even say demure. She asked about “Cecil” with charming naivete. She was frank and girlish. Lots of innocent fun in her, no doubt—she sang us a comic song in excellent taste, which is a severe test—but not a suspicion of double-dealing. If I had not overheard those few words as I came up the stairs, I think I should have gone away believing the poor girl an injured child of nature.

As it was, I went back to London the very next day, determined to renew my slight acquaintance with Reggie Nettlecraft.

Fortunately, I had a good excuse for going to visit him. I had been asked to collect among old Carthusians for one of those endless “testimonials” which pursue one through life, and are, perhaps, the worst Nemesis which follows the crime of having wasted one’s youth at a public school: a testimonial for a retiring master, or professional cricketer, or washerwoman, or something; and in the course of my duties as collector it was quite natural that I should call upon all my fellow-victims. So I went to his rooms in Staples Inn and reintroduced myself.

Reggie Nettlecraft had grown up into an unwholesome, spotty, indeterminate young man, with a speckled necktie, and cuffs of which he was inordinately proud, and which he insisted on “flashing” every second minute. He was also evidently self-satisfied; which was odd, for I have seldom seen anyone who afforded less cause for rational satisfaction. “Hullo,” he said, when I told him my name. “So it’s you, is it, Cumberledge?” He glanced at my card. “St. Nathaniel’s Hospital! What rot! Why, blow me tight if you haven’t turned sawbones!”

“That is my profession,” I answered, unashamed. “And you?”

“Oh, I don’t have any luck, you know, old man. They turned me out of Oxford because I had too much sense of humour for the authorities there—beastly set of old fogeys! Objected to my ‘chucking’ oyster shells at the tutors’ windows—good old English custom, fast becoming obsolete. Then I crammed for the Army. But, bless your heart, a GENTLEMAN has no chance for the Army nowadays; a pack of blooming cads, with what they call ‘intellect,’ read up for the exams, and don’t give US a look-in; I call it sheer piffle. Then the Guv’nor set me on electrical engineering—electrical engineering’s played out. I put no stock in it; besides, it’s such beastly fag; and then, you get your hands dirty. So now I’m reading for the Bar; and if only my coach can put me up to tips enough to dodge the examiners, I expect to be called some time next summer.”

“And when you have failed for everything?” I inquired, just to test his sense of humour.

He swallowed it like a roach. “Oh, when I’ve failed for everything, I shall stick up to the Guv’nor. Hang it all, a GENTLEMAN can’t be expected to earn his own livelihood. England’s going to the dogs, that’s where it is; no snug little sinecures left for chaps like you and me; all this beastly competition. And no respect for the feelings of gentlemen, either! Why, would you believe it, Cumberground—we used to call you Cumberground at Charterhouse, I remember, or was it Fig Tree?—I happened to get a bit lively in the Haymarket last week, after a rattling good supper, and the chap at the police court —old cove with a squint—positively proposed to send me to prison, WITHOUT THE OPTION OF A FINE!—I’ll trouble you for that—send ME to prison just—for knocking down a common brute of a bobby. There’s no mistake about it; England’s NOT a country now for a gentleman to live in.”

“Then why not mark your sense of the fact by leaving it?” I inquired, with a smile.

He shook his head. “What? Emigrate? No, thank you! I’m not taking any. None of your colonies for ME, IF you please. I shall stick to the old ship. I’m too much attached to the Empire.”

“And yet imperialists,” I said, “generally gush over the colonies—the Empire on which the sun never sets.”

"The Empire in Leicester Squire!" he responded, gazing at me with unspoken contempt. "Have a whisky-and-soda, old chap? What, no? 'Never drink between meals?' Well, you DO surprise me! I suppose that comes of being a sawbones, don't it?"

"Possibly," I answered. "We respect our livers." Then I went on to the ostensible reason of my visit—the Charterhouse testimonial. He slapped his thighs metaphorically, by way of suggesting the depleted condition of his pockets. "Stony broke, Cumberledge," he murmured; "stony broke! Honour bright! Unless Bluebird pulls off the Prince of Wales's Stakes, I really don't know how I'm to pay the Benchers."

"It's quite unimportant," I answered. "I was asked to ask you, and I HAVE asked you."

"So I twig, my dear fellow. Sorry to have to say NO. But I'll tell you what I can do for you; I can put you upon a straight thing—"

I glanced at the mantelpiece. "I see you have a photograph of Miss Sissie Montague," I broke in casually, taking it down and examining it. "WITH an autograph, too. 'Reggie, from Sissie.' You are a friend of hers?"

"A friend of hers? I'll trouble you. She IS a clinker, Sissie is! You should see that girl smoke. I give you my word of honour, Cumberledge, she can consume cigarettes against any fellow I know in London. Hang it all, a girl like that, you know—well, one can't help admiring her! Ever seen her?"

"Oh, yes; I know her. I called on her, in fact, night before last, at Scarborough."

He whistled a moment, then broke into an imbecile laugh. "My gum," he cried; "this IS a start, this is! You don't mean to tell me YOU are the other Johnnie."

"What other Johnnie?" I asked, feeling we were getting near it.

He leaned back and laughed again. "Well, you know that girl Sissie, she's a clever one, she is," he went on after a minute, staring at me. "She's a regular clinker! Got two strings to her bow; that's where the trouble comes in. Me and another fellow. She likes me for love and the other fellow for money. Now, don't you come and tell me that YOU are the other fellow."

"I have certainly never aspired to the young lady's hand," I answered, cautiously. "But don't you know your rival's name, then?"

"That's Sissie's blooming cleverness. She's a caulker, Sissie is; you don't take a rise out of Sissie in a hurry. She knows that if I knew who the other bloke was, I'd blow upon her little game to him and put him off her. And I WOULD, s'ep me taters; for I'm nuts on that girl. I tell you, Cumberledge, she IS a clinker!"

"You seem to me admirably adapted for one another," I answered, truthfully. I had not the slightest compunction in handing Reggie Nettlecraft over to Sissie, nor in handing Sissie over to Reggie Nettlecraft.

"Adapted for one another? That's just it. There, you hit the right nail plump on the cocoanut, Cumberground! But Sissie's an artful one, she is. She's playing for the other Johnnie. He's got the dibs, you know; and Sissie wants the dibs even more than she wants yours truly."

"Got what?" I inquired, not quite catching the phrase.

"The dibs, old man; the chink; the oof; the ready rhino. He rolls in it, she says. I can't find out the chap's name, but I know his Guv'nor's something or other in the millionaire trade somewhere across in America."

"She writes to you, I think?"

"That's so; every blooming day; but how the dummy did you come to know it?"

"She lays letters addressed to you on the hall table at her lodgings in Scarborough."

"The dickens she does! Careless little beggar! Yes, she writes to me—pages. She's awfully gone on me, really. She'd marry me if it wasn't for the Johnnie with the dibs. She doesn't care for HIM: she wants his money. He dresses badly, don't you see; and, after all, the clothes make the man! I'D like to get at him. I'D spoil his pretty face for him." And he assumed a playfully pugilistic attitude.

"You really want to get rid of this other fellow?" I asked, seeing my chance.

"Get rid of him? Why, of course! Chuck him into the river some nice dark night if I could once get a look at him!"

"As a preliminary step, would you mind letting me see one of Miss Montague's letters?" I inquired.

He drew a long breath. "They're a bit affectionate, you know," he murmured, stroking his beardless chin in hesitation. "She's a hot 'un, Sissie is. She pitches it pretty warm on the affection-stop, I can tell you. But if you really think you can give the other Johnnie a cut on the head with her letters—well, in the interests of true love, which never DOES run smooth, I don't mind letting you have a squint, as my friend, at one of her charming billy-doos."

He took a bundle from a drawer, ran his eye over one or two with a maudlin air, and then selected a specimen not wholly unsuitable for publication. "THERE'S one in the eye for C.," he said, chuckling. "What would C. say to that, I wonder? She always calls him C., you know; it's so jolly non-committing. She says, 'I only wish that beastly old bore C. were at Halifax—which is where he comes from and then I would fly at once to my own dear Reggie! But, hang it all, Reggie boy, what's the good of true love if you haven't got the dibs? I MUST have my comforts. Love in a cottage is all very well in its way; but who's to pay for the fizz, Reggie?' That's her refinement, don't you see? Sissie's awfully refined. She was brought up with the tastes and habits of a lady."

"Clearly so," I answered. "Both her literary style and her liking for champagne abundantly demonstrate it!" His acute sense of humour did not enable him to detect the irony of my observation. I doubt if it extended much beyond oyster shells. He handed me the letter. I read it through with equal amusement and gratification. If Miss Sissie had written it on purpose in order to open Cecil Holsworthy's eyes, she couldn't have managed the matter better or more effectually. It breathed ardent love, tempered by a determination to sell her charms in the best and highest matrimonial market.

"Now, I know this man, C.," I said when I had finished. "And I want to ask whether you will let me show him Miss Montague's letter. It would set him against the girl, who, as a matter of fact, is wholly unwor—I mean totally unfitted for him."

"Let you show it to him? Like a bird! Why, Sissie promised me herself that if she couldn't bring 'that solemn ass, C.,' up to the scratch by Christmas, she'd chuck him and marry me. It's here, in writing." And he handed me another gem of epistolary literature.

"You have no compunctions?" I asked again, after reading it.

"Not a blessed compunction to my name."

"Then neither have I," I answered.

I felt they both deserved it. Sissie was a minx, as Hilda rightly judged; while as for Nettlecraft—well, if a public school and an English university leave a man a cad, a cad he will be, and there is nothing more to be said about it.

I went straight off with the letters to Cecil Holsworthy. He read them through, half incredulously at first; he was too honest-natured himself to believe in the possibility of such double-dealing—that one could have innocent eyes and golden hair and yet be a trickster. He read them twice; then he compared them word for word with the simple affection and childlike tone of his own last letter received from the same lady. Her versatility of style would have done honour to a practised literary craftsman. At last he handed them back to me. "Do you think," he said, "on the evidence of these, I should be doing wrong in breaking with her?"

"Wrong in breaking with her!" I exclaimed. "You would be doing wrong if you didn't,—wrong to yourself; wrong to your family; wrong, if I may venture to say so, to Daphne; wrong even in the long run to the girl herself; for she is not fitted for you, and she IS fitted for Reggie Nettlecraft. Now, do as I bid you. Sit down at once and write her a letter from my dictation."

He sat down and wrote, much relieved that I took the responsibility off his shoulders.

"DEAR MISS MONTAGUE," I began, "the inclosed letters have come into my hands without my seeking it. After reading them, I feel that I have absolutely no right to stand between you and

the man of your real choice. It would not be kind or wise of me to do so. I release you at once, and consider myself released. You may therefore regard our engagement as irrevocably cancelled.

“Faithfully yours,

“CECIL HOLSWORTHY.”

“Nothing more than that?” he asked, looking up and biting his pen. “Not a word of regret or apology?”

“Not a word,” I answered. “You are really too lenient.”

I made him take it out and post it before he could invent conscientious scruples. Then he turned to me irresolutely. “What shall I do next?” he asked, with a comical air of doubt.

I smiled. “My dear fellow, that is a matter for your own consideration.”

“But—do you think she will laugh at me?”

“Miss Montague?”

“No! Daphne.”

“I am not in not in Daphne’s confidence,” I answered. “I don’t know how she feels. But, on the face of it, I think I can venture to assure you that at least she won’t laugh at you.”

He grasped my hand hard. “You don’t mean to say so!” he cried. “Well, that’s really very, kind of her! A girl of Daphne’s high type! And I, who feel myself so utterly unworthy of her!”

“We are all unworthy of a good woman’s love,” I answered. “But, thank Heaven, the good women don’t seem to realise it.”

That evening, about ten, my new friend came back in a hurry to my rooms at St. Nathaniel’s. Nurse Wade was standing there, giving her report for the night when he entered. His face looked some inches shorter and broader than usual. His eyes beamed. His mouth was radiant.

“Well, you won’t believe it, Dr. Cumberledge,” he began; “but—”

“Yes, I DO believe it,” I answered. “I know it. I have read it already.”

“Read it!” he cried. “Where?”

I waved my hand towards his face. “In a special edition of the evening papers,” I answered, smiling. “Daphne has accepted you!”

He sank into an easy chair, beside himself with rapture. “Yes, yes; that angel! Thanks to YOU, she has accepted me!”

“Thanks to Miss Wade,” I said, correcting him. “It is really all HER doing. If SHE had not seen through the photograph to the face, and through the face to the woman and the base little heart of her, we might never have found her out.”

He turned to Hilda with eyes all gratitude. “You have given me the dearest and best girl on earth,” he cried, seizing both her hands.

“And I have given Daphne a husband who will love and appreciate her,” Hilda answered, flushing.

“You see,” I said, maliciously; “I told you they never find us out, Holsworthy!”

As for Reggie Nettlecraft and his wife, I should like to add that they are getting on quite as well as could be expected. Reggie has joined his Sissie on the music-hall stage; and all those who have witnessed his immensely popular performance of the Drunken Gentleman before the Bow Street Police Court acknowledge without reserve that, after “failing for everything,” he has dropped at last into his true vocation. His impersonation of the part is said to be “nature itself.” I see no reason to doubt it.

CHAPTER III
THE EPISODE OF THE WIFE WHO DID HER DUTY

To make you understand my next yarn, I must go back to the date of my introduction to Hilda.

"It is witchcraft!" I said the first time I saw her, at Le Geyt's luncheon-party.

She smiled a smile which was bewitching, indeed, but by no means witch-like,—a frank, open smile with just a touch of natural feminine triumph in it. "No, not witchcraft," she answered, helping herself with her dainty fingers to a burnt almond from the Venetian glass dish,—"not witchcraft,—memory; aided, perhaps, by some native quickness of perception. Though I say it myself, I never met anyone, I think, whose memory goes quite as far as mine does."

"You don't mean quite as far BACK," I cried, jesting; for she looked about twenty-four, and had cheeks like a ripe nectarine, just as pink and just as softly downy.

She smiled again, showing a row of semi-transparent teeth, with a gleam in the depths of them. She was certainly most attractive. She had that indefinable, incommunicable, unanalysable personal quality which we know as CHARM. "No, not as far BACK," she repeated. "Though, indeed, I often seem to remember things that happened before I was born (like Queen Elizabeth's visit to Kenilworth): I recollect so vividly all that I have heard or read about them. But as far IN EXTENT, I mean. I never let anything drop out of my memory. As this case shows you, I can recall even quite unimportant and casual bits of knowledge when any chance clue happens to bring them back to me."

She had certainly astonished me. The occasion for my astonishment was the fact that when I handed her my card, "Dr. Hubert Ford Cumberledge, St. Nathaniel's Hospital," she had glanced at it for a second and exclaimed, without sensible pause or break, "Oh, then, of course, you're half Welsh, as I am."

The instantaneous and apparent inconsecutiveness of her inference took me aback. "Well, m'yes: I AM half Welsh," I replied. "My mother came from Carnarvonshire. But, why THEN, and OF COURSE? I fail to perceive your train of reasoning."

She laughed a sunny little laugh, like one well accustomed to receive such inquiries. "Fancy asking A WOMAN to give you 'the train of reasoning' for her intuitions!" she cried, merrily. "That shows, Dr. Cumberledge, that you are a mere man—a man of science, perhaps, but NOT a psychologist. It also suggests that you are a confirmed bachelor. A married man accepts intuitions, without expecting them to be based on reasoning.... Well, just this once, I will stretch a point to enlighten you. If I recollect right, your mother died about three years ago?"

"You are quite correct. Then you knew my mother?"

"Oh, dear me, no! I never even met her. Why THEN?"

Her look was mischievous. "But, unless I mistake, I think she came from Hendre Coed, near Bangor."

"Wales is a village!" I exclaimed, catching my breath. "Every Welsh person seems to know all about every other."

My new acquaintance smiled again. When she smiled she was irresistible: a laughing face protruding from a cloud of diaphanous drapery. "Now, shall I tell you how I came to know that?" she asked, poising a glace cherry on her dessert fork in front of her. "Shall I explain my trick, like the conjurers?"

"Conjurers never explain anything," I answered. "They say: 'So, you see, THAT'S how it's done!'—with a swift whisk of the hand—and leave you as much in the dark as ever. Don't explain like the conjurers, but tell me how you guessed it."

She shut her eyes and seemed to turn her glance inward.

"About three years ago," she began slowly, like one who reconstructs with an effort a half-forgotten scene, "I saw a notice in the Times—Births, Deaths, and Marriages—'On the 27th of October'—was it the 27th?" The keen brown eyes opened again for a second and flashed inquiry into mine.

"Quite right," I answered, nodding.

"I thought so. 'On the 27th of October, at Brynmor, Bournemouth, Emily Olwen Josephine, widow of the late Thomas Cumberledge, sometime colonel of the 7th Bengal Regiment of Foot, and daughter of Iolo Gwyn Ford, Esq., J.P., of Hendre Coed, near Bangor. Am I correct?" She lifted her dark eyelashes once more and flooded me.

"You are quite correct," I answered, surprised. "And that is really all that you knew of my mother?"

"Absolutely all. The moment I saw your card, I thought to myself, in a breath: 'Ford, Cumberledge; what do I know of those two names? I have some link between them. Ah, yes; found Mrs. Cumberledge, wife of Colonel Thomas Cumberledge, of the 7th Bengals, was a Miss Ford, daughter of a Mr. Ford, of Bangor.' That came to me like a lightning-gleam. Then I said to myself again, 'Dr. Hubert Ford Cumberledge must be their son.' So there you have 'the train of reasoning.' Women CAN reason—sometimes. I had to think twice, though, before I could recall the exact words of the Times notice."

"And can you do the same with everyone?"

"Everyone! Oh, come, now: that is expecting too much! I have not read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested everyone's family announcements. I don't pretend to be the Peerage, the Clergy List, and the London Directory rolled into one. I remembered YOUR family all the more vividly, no doubt, because of the pretty and unusual old Welsh names, 'Olwen' and 'Iolo Gwyn Ford,' which fixed themselves on my memory by their mere beauty. Everything about Wales always attracts me; my Welsh side is uppermost. But I have hundreds—oh, thousands—of such facts stored and pigeon-holed in my memory. If anybody else cares to try me," she glanced round the table, "perhaps we may be able to test my power that way."

Two or three of the company accepted her challenge, giving the full names of their sisters or brothers; and, in three cases out of five, my witch was able to supply either the notice of their marriage or some other like published circumstance. In the instance of Charlie Vere, it is true, she went wrong, just at first, though only in a single small particular; it was not Charlie himself who was gazetted to a sub-lieutenancy in the Warwickshire Regiment, but his brother Walter. However, the moment she was told of this slip, she corrected herself at once, and added, like lightning, "Ah, yes: how stupid of me! I have mixed up the names. Charles Cassilis Vere got an appointment on the same day in the Rhodesian Mounted Police, didn't he?" Which was in point of fact quite accurate.

But I am forgetting that all this time I have not even now introduced my witch to you.

Hilda Wade, when I first saw her, was one of the prettiest, cheeriest, and most graceful girls I have ever met—a dusky blonde, brown-eyed, brown-haired, with a creamy, waxen whiteness of skin that was yet warm and peach-downy. And I wish to insist from the outset upon the plain fact that there was nothing uncanny about her. In spite of her singular faculty of insight, which sometimes seemed to illogical people almost weird or eerie, she was in the main a bright, well-educated, sensible, winsome, lawn-tennis-playing English girl. Her vivacious spirits rose superior to her surroundings, which were often sad enough. But she was above all things wholesome, unaffected, and sparkling—a gleam of sunshine. She laid no claim to supernatural powers; she held no dealings with familiar spirits; she was simply a girl of strong personal charm, endowed with an astounding memory and a rare measure of feminine intuition. Her memory, she told me, she shared with her father and all her father's family; they were famous for their prodigious faculty in that respect. Her impulsive temperament and quick instincts, on the other hand, descended to her, she thought, from her mother and her Welsh ancestry.

Externally, she seemed thus at first sight little more than the ordinary pretty, light-hearted English girl, with a taste for field sports (especially riding), and a native love of the country. But at times one caught in the brightened colour of her lustrous brown eyes certain curious undercurrents of depth, of reserve, and of a questioning wistfulness which made you suspect the presence of profounder elements in her nature. From the earliest moment of our acquaintance, indeed, I can say with truth that Hilda Wade interested me immensely. I felt drawn. Her face had that strange quality of compelling attention for which we have as yet no English name, but which everybody recognises. You could not ignore her. She stood out. She was the sort of girl one was constrained to notice.

It was Le Geyts first luncheon-party since his second marriage. Big-bearded, genial, he beamed round on us jubilant. He was proud of his wife and proud of his recent Q.C.-ship. The new Mrs. Le Geyt sat at the head of the table, handsome, capable, self-possessed; a vivid, vigorous woman and a model hostess. Though still quite young, she was large and commanding. Everybody was impressed by her. "Such a good mother to those poor motherless children!" all the ladies declared in a chorus of applause. And, indeed, she had the face of a splendid manager.

I said as much in an undertone over the ices to Miss Wade, who sat beside me—though I ought not to have discussed them at their own table. "Hugo Le Geyt seems to have made an excellent choice," I murmured. "Maisie and Ettie will be lucky, indeed, to be taken care of by such a competent stepmother. Don't you think so?"

My witch glanced up at her hostess with a piercing dart of the keen brown eyes, held her wine-glass half raised, and then electrified me by uttering, in the same low voice, audible to me alone, but quite clearly and unhesitatingly, these astounding words:

"I think, before twelve mouths are out, MR. LE GEYT WILL HAVE MURDERED HER!"

For a minute I could not answer, so startling was the effect of this confident prediction. One does not expect to be told such things at lunch, over the port and peaches, about one's dearest friends, beside their own mahogany. And the assured air of unfaltering conviction with which Hilda Wade said it to a complete stranger took my breath away. WHY did she think so at all? And IF she thought so why choose ME as the recipient of her singular confidences?

I gasped and wondered.

"What makes you fancy anything so unlikely?" I asked aside at last, behind the babel of voices. "You quite alarm me."

She rolled a mouthful of apricot ice reflectively on her tongue, and then murmured, in a similar aside, "Don't ask me now. Some other time will do. But I mean what I say. Believe me; I do not speak at random."

She was quite right, of course. To continue would have been equally rude and foolish. I had perforce to bottle up my curiosity for the moment and wait till my sibyl was in the mood for interpreting.

After lunch we adjourned to the drawing-room. Almost at once, Hilda Wade flitted up with her brisk step to the corner where I was sitting. "Oh, Dr. Cumberledge," she began, as if nothing odd had occurred before, "I WAS so glad to meet you and have a chance of talking to you, because I DO so want to get a nurse's place at St. Nathaniel's."

"A nurse's place!" I exclaimed, a little surprised, surveying her dress of palest and softest Indian muslin; for she looked to me far too much of a butterfly for such serious work. "Do you really mean it; or are you one of the ten thousand modern young ladies who are in quest of a Mission, without understanding that Missions are unpleasant? Nursing, I can tell you, is not all crimped cap and becoming uniform."

"I know that," she answered, growing grave. "I ought to know it. I am a nurse already at St. George's Hospital."

"You are a nurse! And at St. George's! Yet you want to change to Nathaniel's? Why? St. George's is in a much nicer part of London, and the patients there come on an average from a much better class than ours in Smithfield."

"I know that too; but… Sebastian is at St. Nathaniel's—and I want to be near Sebastian."

"Professor Sebastian!" I cried, my face lighting up with a gleam of enthusiasm at our great teacher's name. "Ah, if it is to be under Sebastian that you desire, I can see you mean business. I know now you are in earnest."

"In earnest?" she echoed, that strange deeper shade coming over her face as she spoke, while her tone altered. "Yes, I think I am in earnest! It is my object in life to be near Sebastian—to watch him and observe him. I mean to succeed.... But I have given you my confidence, perhaps too hastily, and I must implore you not to mention my wish to him."

"You may trust me implicitly," I answered.

"Oh, yes; I saw that," she put in, with a quick gesture. "Of course, I saw by your face you were a man of honour—a man one could trust or I would not have spoken to you. But—you promise me?"

"I promise you," I replied, naturally flattered. She was delicately pretty, and her quaint, oracular air, so incongruous with the dainty face and the fluffy brown hair, piqued me not a little. That special mysterious commodity of CHARM seemed to pervade all she did and said. So I added: "And I will mention to Sebastian that you wish for a nurse's place at Nathaniel's. As you have had experience, and can be recommended, I suppose, by Le Geyt's sister," with whom she had come, "no doubt you can secure an early vacancy."

"Thanks so much," she answered, with that delicious smile. It had an infantile simplicity about it which contrasted most piquantly with her prophetic manner.

"Only," I went on, assuming a confidential tone, "you really MUST tell me why you said that just now about Hugo Le Geyt. Recollect, your Delphian utterances have gravely astonished and disquieted me. Hugo is one of my oldest and dearest friends; and I want to know why you have formed this sudden bad opinion of him."

"Not of HIM, but of HER," she answered, to my surprise, taking a small Norwegian dagger from the what-not and playing with it to distract attention.

"Come, come, now," I cried, drawing back. "You are trying to mystify me. This is deliberate seer-mongery. You are presuming on your powers. But I am not the sort of man to be caught by horoscopes. I decline to believe it."

She turned on me with a meaning glance. Those truthful eyes fixed me. "I am going from here straight to my hospital," she murmured, with a quiet air of knowledge—talking, I mean to say, like one who really knows. "This room is not the place to discuss this matter, is it? If you will walk back to St. George's with me, I think I can make you see and feel that I am speaking, not at haphazard, but from observation and experience."

Her confidence roused my most vivid curiosity. When she left I left with her. The Le Geyts lived in one of those new streets of large houses on Campden Hill, so that our way eastward lay naturally through Kensington Gardens.

It was a sunny June day, when light pierced even through the smoke of London, and the shrubberies breathed the breath of white lilacs. "Now, what did you mean by that enigmatical saying?" I asked my new Cassandra, as we strolled down the scent-laden path. "Woman's intuition is all very well in its way; but a mere man may be excused if he asks for evidence."

She stopped short as I spoke, and gazed full into my eyes. Her hand fingered her parasol handle. "I meant what I said," she answered, with emphasis. "Within one year, Mr. Le Geyt will have murdered his wife. You may take my word, for it."

"Le Geyt!" I cried. "Never! I know the man so well! A big, good-natured, kindly schoolboy! He is the gentlest and best of mortals. Le Geyt a murderer! Im—possible!"

Her eyes were far away. “Has it never occurred to you,” she asked, slowly, with her pythoness air, “that there are murders and murders?—murders which depend in the main upon the murderer… and also murders which depend in the main upon the victim?”

“The victim? What do you mean?”

“Well, there are brutal men who commit murder out of sheer brutality—the ruffians of the slums; and there are sordid men who commit murder for sordid money—the insurers who want to forestall their policies, the poisoners who want to inherit property; but have you ever realised that there are also murderers who become so by accident, through their victims’ idiosyncrasy? I thought all the time while I was watching Mrs. Le Geyt, ‘That woman is of the sort predestined to be murdered.’… And when you asked me, I told you so. I may have been imprudent; still, I saw it, and I said it.”

“But this is second sight!” I cried, drawing away. “Do you pretend to prevision?”

“No, not second sight; nothing uncanny, nothing supernatural. But prevision, yes; prevision based, not on omens or auguries, but on solid fact—on what I have seen and noticed.”

“Explain yourself, oh, prophetess!”

She let the point of her parasol make a curved trail on the gravel, and followed its serpentine wavings with her eyes. “You know our house surgeon?” she asked at last, looking up of a sudden.

“What, Travers? Oh, intimately.”

“Then come to my ward and see. After you have seen, you will perhaps believe me.”

Nothing that I could say would get any further explanation out of her just then. “You would laugh at me if I told you,” she persisted; “you won’t laugh when you have seen it.”

We walked on in silence as far as Hyde Park Corner. There my Sphinx tripped lightly up the steps of St. George’s Hospital. “Get Mr. Travers’s leave,” she said, with a nod, and a bright smile, “to visit Nurse Wade’s ward. Then come up to me there in five minutes.”

I explained to my friend the house surgeon that I wished to see certain cases in the accident ward of which I had heard; he smiled a restrained smile—“Nurse Wade, no doubt!” but, of course, gave me permission to go up and look at them. “Stop a minute,” he added, “and I’ll come with you.” When we got there, my witch had already changed her dress, and was waiting for us demurely in the neat dove-coloured gown and smooth white apron of the hospital nurses. She looked even prettier and more meaningful so than in her ethereal outside summer-cloud muslin.

“Come over to this bed,” she said at once to Travers and myself, without the least air of mystery. “I will show you what I mean by it.”

“Nurse Wade has remarkable insight,” Travers whispered to me as we went.

“I can believe it,” I answered.

“Look at this woman,” she went on, aside, in a low voice—“no, NOT the first bed; the one beyond it; Number 60. I don’t want the patient to know you are watching her. Do you observe anything odd about her appearance?”

“She is somewhat the same type,” I began, “as Mrs.—”

Before I could get out the words “Le Geyt,” her warning eye and puckering forehead had stopped me. “As the lady we were discussing,” she interposed, with a quiet wave of one hand. “Yes, in some points very much so. You notice in particular her scanty hair—so thin and poor—though she is young and good-looking?”

“It is certainly rather a feeble crop for a woman of her age,” I admitted. “And pale at that, and washy.”

“Precisely. It’s done up behind about as big as a nutmeg.... Now, observe the contour of her back as she sits up there; it is curiously curved, isn’t it?”

“Very,” I replied. “Not exactly a stoop, nor yet quite a hunch, but certainly an odd spinal configuration.”

“Like our friend’s, once more?”

“Like our friend’s, exactly!”

Hilda Wade looked away, lest she should attract the patient's attention. "Well, that woman was brought in here, half-dead, assaulted by her husband," she went on, with a note of unobtrusive demonstration.

"We get a great many such cases," Travers put in, with true medical unconcern, "very interesting cases; and Nurse Wade has pointed out to me the singular fact that in almost all instances the patients resemble one another physically."

"Incredible!" I cried. "I can understand that there might well be a type of men who assault their wives, but not, surely, a type of women who get assaulted."

"That is because you know less about it than Nurse Wade," Travers answered, with an annoying smile of superior knowledge.

Our instructress moved on to another bed, laying one gentle hand as she passed on a patient's forehead. The patient glanced gratitude. "That one again," she said once more, half indicating a cot at a little distance: "Number 74. She has much the same thin hair—sparse, weak, and colourless. She has much the same curved back, and much the same aggressive, self-assertive features. Looks capable, doesn't she? A born housewife!… Well, she, too, was knocked down and kicked half-dead the other night by her husband."

"It is certainly odd," I answered, "how very much they both recall—"

"Our friend at lunch! Yes, extraordinary. See here"; she pulled out a pencil and drew the quick outline of a face in her note-book. "THAT is what is central and essential to the type. They have THIS sort of profile. Women with faces like that ALWAYS get assaulted."

Travers glanced over her shoulder. "Quite true," he assented, with his bourgeois nod. "Nurse Wade in her time has shown me dozens of them. Round dozens: bakers' dozens! They all belong to that species. In fact, when a woman of this type is brought in to us wounded now, I ask at once, 'Husband?' and the invariable answer comes pat: 'Well, yes, sir; we had some words together.' The effect of words, my dear fellow, is something truly surprising."

"They can pierce like a dagger," I mused.

"And leave an open wound behind that requires dressing," Travers added, unsuspecting. Practical man, Travers!

"But WHY do they get assaulted—the women of this type?" I asked, still bewildered.

"Number 87 has her mother just come to see her," my sorceress interposed. "SHE'S an assault case; brought in last night; badly kicked and bruised about the head and shoulders. Speak to the mother. She'll explain it all to you."

Travers and I moved over to the cot her hand scarcely indicated. "Well, your daughter looks pretty comfortable this afternoon, in spite of the little fuss," Travers began, tentatively.

"Yus, she's a bit tidy, thanky," the mother answered, smoothing her soiled black gown, grown green with long service. "She'll git on naow, please Gord. But Joe most did for 'er."

"How did it all happen?" Travers asked, in a jaunty tone, to draw her out.

"Well, it was like this, sir, yer see. My daughter, she's a lidy as keeps 'erself TO 'erself, as the sayin' is, an' 'olds 'er 'ead up. She keeps up a proper pride, an' minds 'er 'ouse an' 'er little uns. She ain't no gadabaht. But she 'AVE a tongue, she 'ave"; the mother lowered her voice cautiously, lest the "lidy" should hear. "I don't deny it that she 'AVE a tongue, at times, through myself 'avin' suffered from it. And when she DO go on, Lord bless you, why, there ain't no stoppin' of 'er."

"Oh, she has a tongue, has she?" Travers replied, surveying the "case" critically. "Well, you know, she looks like it."

"So she do, sir; so she do. An' Joe, 'e's a man as wouldn't 'urt a biby—not when 'e's sober, Joe wouldn't. But 'e'd bin aht; that's where it is; an' 'e cum 'ome lite, a bit fresh, through 'avin' bin at the friendly lead; an' my daughter, yer see, she up an' give it to 'im. My word, she DID give it to 'im! An' Joe, 'e's a peaceable man when 'e ain't a bit fresh; 'e's more like a friend to 'er than an 'usband, Joe

is; but 'e lost 'is temper that time, as yer may say, by reason o' bein' fresh, an' 'e knocked 'er abaht a little, an' knocked 'er teeth aht. So we brought 'er to the orspital."

The injured woman raised herself up in bed with a vindictive scowl, displaying as she did so the same whale-like curved back as in the other "cases." "But we've sent 'im to the lockup," she continued, the scowl giving way fast to a radiant joy of victory as she contemplated her triumph "an' wot's more, I 'ad the last word of 'im. 'An 'e'll git six month for this, the neighbours says; an' when he comes aht again, my Gord, won't 'e ketch it!"

"You look capable of punishing him for it," I answered, and as I spoke, I shuddered; for I saw her expression was precisely the expression Mrs. Le Geyt's face had worn for a passing second when her husband accidentally trod on her dress as we left the dining-room.

My witch moved away. We followed. "Well, what do you say to it now?" she asked, gliding among the beds with noiseless feet and ministering fingers.

"Say to it?" I answered. "That it is wonderful, wonderful. You have quite convinced me."

"You would think so," Travers put in, "if you had been in this ward as often as I have, and observed their faces. It's a dead certainty. Sooner or later, that type of woman is cock-sure to be assaulted."

"In a certain rank of life, perhaps," I answered, still loth to believe it; "but not surely in ours. Gentlemen do not knock down their wives and kick their teeth out."

My Sibyl smiled. "No; there class tells," she admitted. "They take longer about it, and suffer more provocation. They curb their tempers. But in the end, one day, they are goaded beyond endurance; and then—a convenient knife—a rusty old sword—a pair of scissors—anything that comes handy, like that dagger this morning. One wild blow—half unpremeditated—and… the thing is done! Twelve good men and true will find it wilful murder."

I felt really perturbed. "But can we do nothing," I cried, "to warn poor Hugo?"

"Nothing, I fear," she answered. "After all, character must work itself out in its interactions with character. He has married that woman, and he must take the consequences. Does not each of us in life suffer perforce the Nemesis of his own temperament?"

"Then is there not also a type of men who assault their wives?"

"That is the odd part of it—no. All kinds, good and bad, quick and slow, can be driven to it at last. The quick-tempered stab or kick; the slow devise some deliberate means of ridding themselves of their burden."

"But surely we might caution Le Geyt of his danger!"

"It is useless. He would not believe us. We cannot be at his elbow to hold back his hand when the bad moment comes. Nobody will be there, as a matter of fact; for women of this temperament—born naggers, in short, since that's what it comes to—when they are also ladies, graceful and gracious as she is; never nag at all before outsiders. To the world, they are bland; everybody says, 'What charming talkers!' They are 'angels abroad, devils at home,' as the proverb puts it. Some night she will provoke him when they are alone, till she has reached his utmost limit of endurance—and then," she drew one hand across her dove-like throat, "it will be all finished."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it. We human beings go straight like sheep to our natural destiny."

"But—that is fatalism."

"No, not fatalism: insight into temperament. Fatalists believe that your life is arranged for you beforehand from without; willy-nilly, you MUST act so. I only believe that in this jostling world your life is mostly determined by your own character, in its interaction with the characters of those who surround you. Temperament works itself out. It is your own acts and deeds that make up Fate for you."

For some months after this meeting neither Hilda Wade nor I saw anything more of the Le Geyts. They left town for Scotland at the end of the season; and when all the grouse had been duly slaughtered and all the salmon duly hooked, they went on to Leicestershire for the opening of fox-

hunting; so it was not till after Christmas that they returned to Campden Hill. Meanwhile, I had spoken to Dr. Sebastian about Miss Wade, and on my recommendation he had found her a vacancy at our hospital. "A most intelligent girl, Cumberledge," he remarked to me with a rare burst of approval —for the Professor was always critical—after she had been at work for some weeks at St. Nathaniel's. "I am glad you introduced her here. A nurse with brains is such a valuable accessory—unless, of course, she takes to THINKING. But Nurse Wade never THINKS; she is a useful instrument—does what she's told, and carries out one's orders implicitly."

"She knows enough to know when she doesn't know," I answered, "which is really the rarest kind of knowledge."

"Unrecorded among young doctors!" the Professor retorted, with his sardonic smile. "They think they understand the human body from top to toe, when, in reality—well, they might do the measles!"

Early in January, I was invited again to lunch with the Le Geyts. Hilda Wade was invited, too. The moment we entered the house, we were both of us aware that some grim change had come over it. Le Geyt met us in the hall, in his old genial style, it is true; but still with a certain reserve, a curious veiled timidity which we had not known in him. Big and good-humoured as he was, with kindly eyes beneath the shaggy eyebrows, he seemed strangely subdued now; the boyish buoyancy had gone out of him. He spoke rather lower than was his natural key, and welcomed us warmly, though less effusively than of old. An irreproachable housemaid, in a spotless cap, ushered us into the transfigured drawing-room. Mrs. Le Geyt, in a pretty cloth dress, neatly tailor-made, rose to meet us, beaming the vapid smile of the perfect hostess—that impartial smile which falls, like the rain from Heaven, on good and bad indifferently. "SO charmed to see you again, Dr. Cumberledge!" she bubbled out, with a cheerful air—she was always cheerful, mechanically cheerful, from a sense of duty. "It IS such a pleasure to meet dear Hugo's old friends! AND Miss Wade, too; how delightful! You look so well, Miss Wade! Oh, you're both at St. Nathaniel's now, aren't you? So you can come together. What a privilege for you, Dr. Cumberledge, to have such a clever assistant—or, rather, fellow-worker. It must be a great life, yours, Miss Wade; such a sphere of usefulness! If we can only feel we are DOING GOOD—that is the main matter. For my own part, I like to be mixed up with every good work that's going on in my neighbourhood. I'm the soup-kitchen, you know, and I'm visitor at the workhouse; and I'm the Dorcas Society, and the Mutual Improvement Class; and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and to Children, and I'm sure I don't know how much else; so that, what with all that, and what with dear Hugo and the darling children"—she glanced affectionately at Maisie and Ettie, who sat bolt upright, very mute and still, in their best and stiffest frocks, on two stools in the corner—"I can hardly find time for my social duties."

"Oh, dear Mrs. Le Geyt," one of her visitors said with effusion, from beneath a nodding bonnet —she was the wife of a rural dean from Staffordshire—"EVERYBODY is agreed that YOUR social duties are performed to a marvel. They are the envy of Kensington. We all of us wonder, indeed, how one woman can find time for all of it!"

Our hostess looked pleased. "Well, yes," she answered, gazing down at her fawn-coloured dress with a half-suppressed smile of self-satisfaction, "I flatter myself I CAN get through about as much work in a day as anybody!" Her eye wandered round her rooms with a modest air of placid self-approval which was almost comic. Everything in them was as well-kept and as well-polished as good servants, thoroughly drilled, could make it. Not a stain or a speck anywhere. A miracle of neatness. Indeed, when I carelessly drew the Norwegian dagger from its scabbard, as we waited for lunch, and found that it stuck in the sheath, I almost started to discover that rust could intrude into that orderly household.

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