

JIM MORTIMER

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JIM MORTIMER ***

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JIM MORTIMER

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WITH SIXTEEN FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS
BY GORDON BROWNE

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JIM MORTIMER.

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCING JIM.

People, unless they be star-gazers, do not walk along, as a rule, with their faces turned towards the sky; hence it was that the slender telephone wire communicating between Dr Mortimer's private residence, "Pangora," and the doctor's private asylum, escaped the notice of all but a few who fared along the eight miles of high road dividing Threeways from Millingbourne, in the county of Eastfolkshire.

And yet this slender wire, which showed up against the blue sky much like a substantial cobweb, was fraught with interest. It was barely 300 yards in length, its installation had been a comparatively cheap and simple undertaking, and it had paid for itself scores of times over. Messages of life and death passed across it constantly; instructions in cases of emergency, tingling over the white line of road, saved the time that would otherwise have been occupied in walking the 300 yards—for doctors do not often run; reprimands were roared across it, bulletins despatched by its agency, dietary altered, medicine prescribed.

The sunshine was coquetting with the little wire, and the great oaks and elms were surveying the flirtation with affected indifference, one bright September morning, when Mr James Mortimer, the Doctor's grandson, who was known among his hospital intimates as the "Long 'Un," having breakfasted in trousers, shirt, and dressing-gown, rose from the table and ambled out into the surgery—for, in addition to an asylum, the doctor had a lucrative practice in that part of Eastfolkshire. The waiting-room adjoining the surgery was empty, save for one small, pale boy.

Although James was on holiday, he occasionally acted as deputy when his grandfather and the latter's assistant were not at hand. And James was quite competent to do so, for he was a fully qualified surgeon.

"Well, Johnny, been eating green pears?"

The urchin looked guilty.

"Y-yes, sir."

"Let's see your tongue—ah! hum!" and the Long 'Un affected a serious expression as he mixed a stiffish dose of black draught. The urchin pulled a very wry face as he tasted the dose, and stopped for breath half-way through it.

"Every drop!" commanded the Long 'Un.

The urchin obeyed him, and then, bursting into tears, was pleased to be violently sick.

"You'll feel better now—and here's a penny for you," quoth Jim Mortimer,

in a truly paternal way for four-and-twenty.

But the urchin renewed his howling.

"I—I came up for me mother's medicine," he quavered; "I—she—she didn't know I'd been eatin' pears."

The Long 'Un threw back his head and burst into a roar of laughter.

"By George! what a shot! Why, Johnny, I thought you'd come to be doctored. Well, here's sixpence for you. Call again for the medicine—I don't know anything about it."

The urchin took the sixpence with a smile showing through his tears, and with a final sniff shuffled out of the waiting-room.

The Long 'Un still looking highly amused, approached the telephone and rang up the asylum.

"Ay, ay, sir!" came the response.

"That you, Hughes?"

"Yes, Mr James."

"How's the Zoo?"

"All quiet except the major. We've had to put him in the padded room."

"The major again!"

"Yes, sir; broke out at breakfast. It took three of us to get him down. He very near pulled Smith's windpipe out."

"He doesn't like Smith, does he?"

"Ates him, sir."

"I think I'll come across and have a look at him," said Jim. "I have an idea I can handle the old chap."

"Glad to see you, Mr James," replied the head attendant; "you're going back to town to-day, aren't you, sir?"

"Yes—back to-day, worse luck."

Without bothering to alter his garb, Jim Mortimer, his gay dressing-gown sweeping the ground, strolled out into the garden and sauntered along the gravel path which led to the high road. As he went he pulled lazily at his pipe. Both of the gardeners touched their hats and smiled a welcome as he passed; the Long 'Un was a favourite all over the settlement.

Certainly he looked a quaint figure as he emerged into the high road—a quaint but not unpleasing one. Long he was—six feet, and four inches over that—but square-shouldered and supple. His carriage was easy, but not of a military description, and he stooped slightly, with the stoop of the rowing-man rather than that of one engaged in sedentary work or of one who has overgrown his strength. He looked, as he strolled across the road, like a long, lean hound, trained to the hour, hard as steel and tough as hickory. His face was well cut, with rather sleepy eyes and a certain gentleness about the corners of the mouth that had

caused his school-fellows to regard him as somewhat of a "soft"—until he hit them. His hair was clipped short and well brushed, and his complexion was pink with health and the application of cold water.

As Jim was moving across the road in his indolently graceful way, a carriage and pair approached at a quick trot. At a word from one of its occupants the coachman pulled up close by the young surgeon.

"Can you tell me, please, if this is Dr Mortimer's?" inquired a stern-faced elderly lady, whose rich mantle and handsome equipage betokened her to be a person of means and possibly of position.

"Yes, all of this," replied Jim, with a comprehensive wave of his hand which took in each side of the road, "is Dr Mortimer's." A pretty girl was sitting by his questioner's side, and the fact was not lost upon Jim. "The Doctor is out," he added, "but I am a medical man. Can I be of service to you?"

The lady surveyed Jim's dressing-gown with evident disapproval, but Jim glanced unconcernedly at the telephone wire overhead. Meanwhile the pretty girl gazed straight before her at the blue smoke curling over the housetops in Threeways, having decided that this very tall man in such unorthodox attire was quite good-looking.

"I prefer to see Dr Mortimer himself. Do you think he will be in soon?"

"He may be in at any moment," said Jim; "that is the way to his house," he added to the coachman, "through those gates."

"I am obliged to you."

The lady sat back without troubling to bestow another glance on Jim, but she observed to her companion as they entered the drive that the extraordinary young fellow in the dressing-gown was probably one of the madmen.

Jim Mortimer, sauntering on, at length reached the asylum, a cheerful-looking red-brick-building, standing healthily high. He found Hughes in the patients' common room—a spacious and airy apartment provided with a piano, a bagatelle board, and other requisites for indoor pastimes.

As Jim was chatting with the head attendant, a grey-haired, round-shouldered man of some sixty summers came up to them.

"Take care, Mr James!" he exclaimed, "he's just behind you! Oh, if I had a gun now!"

Jim knew that Mr Richards—the speaker—had "alligators" on his bad days.

"No, he's gone under the table," replied Jim. "See him? Here, lend me a cue, and I'll kill him."

"That's right," said the poor fellow; "kill him, and I'll leave you all my money. He sat on the end of my bed last night—he won't let me alone. Kill him now he's not looking."

Jim seized the cue and slashed about under the table with it.

"There—I've done it. I've cut his head off!"

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" cried Mr Richards, bursting into tears. "You shall have every penny of my money."

They left him crying quietly for joy. In a corner of the room a saturnine-looking gentleman was standing stock still with his eyes closed.

"Hullo!" said Jim, "I've not seen this one before. Who is he?"

"A new patient—a clergyman," replied Hughes; "he thinks he's dead. Comes to life for his meals, though."

Jim laughed—the careless laugh of thoughtless youth—but the next moment his face became grave. He felt very much for these afflicted souls, and they seemed to know it, for in their half-witted way they loved "Mr James."

After passing through several corridors, Jim and Hughes arrived at a room that was provided with a thick door in which was a grille of the old-fashioned kind. Within could be seen a red-faced, burly man, his clothing much disarranged, and his eyes wildly gleaming.

A stalwart attendant, with a bandage round his neck, was standing by, watching the occupant of the padded room through the little bars of the grille.

"I'll go in and have a chat with him," said Jim.

"You'd better not, sir," returned Hughes; "you'll take your life in your hands if you do."

"Nonsense!" cried Jim. "Open the door, Smith!"

The attendant Smith—he who had been so unfortunate as to earn the major's ill-will—shot back the bolt, and, as Jim stepped into the cell, made haste to secure the door behind him.

The patient fixed a glare of bovine ferocity on his caller as Jim advanced towards him.

"Morning, major! Men pretty fit this morning?"

The major had been about to hurl himself at the young fellow when Jim's words stirred an old memory in his inflamed brain.

"What's that to you—who are you?" he growled.

"The officer commanding the expedition," rapped out Jim.

The major's manner changed on the instant.

"The men are as well as can be expected, sir, considering the beastly bad water. Three more down with enteric to-day."

"Dear—dear!" exclaimed Jim, "that's bad. Well, major, we must hope for the best—hope for the best. And how are you yourself?"

"I think I've got a touch of the sun, sir," said the major, "but I daresay it'll pass off. I've been feeling queer up here for several days now," he added, touching his forehead.

"What you want, major," said Jim, "is a good sound sleep. You're look-

ing overworked. Now just you lie down on your mattress yonder and have a nap. You've been doing very well lately, major, and I shall mention you in my despatches."

The poor madman's face glowed with delight.

"I'm very much obliged to you, sir," he said, with a world of gratitude in his voice.

"Well," said Jim, "I must be going on. Now, do as I say, and have some sleep."

"Thank you, sir, I think I will," said the major, turning towards the mattress with touching docility.

Unfortunately, however, he happened to look round at the grating, and in an instant his face and manner changed. Jim, following the lunatic's glance, saw that the attendant Smith was still peering through the bars.

"Get away from there—sharp!" he shouted, but even as he spoke the major hurled himself against the staunch oaken portal, and tore at it with his nails as he yelled imprecations at the object of his hate.

Jim stepped swiftly forward and laid his hand on the madman's shoulder. The major turned like an infuriated beast, his fingers twitching, and his whole body convulsed with fury.

"I told you to get some sleep, major," said Jim, imperiously, "and I expect my orders to be obeyed."

For a terrible moment the attendants held their breath. But Jim looked the major coolly in the face. Had he flinched the very slightest, the madman would have been at his throat.

Still steadily eyeing the man, Jim pointed to the mattress, and slowly, doubtfully, the major crept towards it and lay down. In two minutes he was slumbering like a child.

Jim made sure that the major was fast asleep before he softly approached the door. Hughes let him out and shot the bolt back into its socket with all possible speed.

"The Doctor himself couldn't have done it better, sir," said the head attendant, with heartfelt admiration. "Will you come and see the cricket now, sir?" he added.

The milder of the asylum's inmates were trying conclusions with bat and ball in an adjoining field. Jim, on arriving at the scene of play, displaced one of the attendants who was acting as wicket-keeper, and took up his position behind the sticks.

The ball came swiftly, and the batsman—a tall, broad-shouldered, ill-tempered-looking fellow—snicked it into Jim's ready hands.

"*How's that?*" roared the Long 'Un; but the attendant umpiring at the other end, being a diplomat, gave it as "Not out."

As Jim trundled the ball back to the bowler, the big batsman turned to him and testily observed, "Please don't ask a question of that sort again. I don't like it."

"My dear man," said Mortimer, assuming that he was addressing one of the most reasonable inmates of the place, "if I catch you at the wicket, you're out. That's only fair."

But the batsman merely glared at him sulkily.

The next ball was a still more palpable catch at the wicket, and was securely held.

"*How's that?*" inquired Jim, who didn't believe in showing the white feather. The words had hardly left his lips when the batsman swung round and aimed a terrific blow at his head—a blow that Jim, by great agility, just managed to avoid.

"I told you," said the batsman, with dignity, "that I did not like you saying that."

The ever-watchful Hughes hurried up.

"They're only satisfied by being clean bowled, Mr James," he explained, and then proceeded to administer a few words of rebuke to Jim's assailant, who looked duly reprovèd.

The Long 'Un was meditating trying an over—with the laudable object of getting the big batsman out in a way he would quite understand—when a page-boy came hurrying towards him with a message to the effect that the Doctor wished to speak to him at the telephone.

So Jim had perforce to postpone his over, and left the field little dreaming that certain words which would shortly come to him across the wire were destined to affect his after-career in a remarkable manner.

CHAPTER II. OVER THE TELEPHONE.

Old Dr Mortimer was, in every sense of the word, a hard man. Of massive build and handsome countenance, upright and commanding in presence, with a clear brain, a will of iron, and a resonant, penetrating voice, his was at once a dominating and notable personality.

Dr Mortimer's sphere of action, it is true, was limited and local; but if, by the accident of circumstances, his lot had been cast in a military or political arena,

he would assuredly have risen to a high place, and possibly cut his initials on the rock of fame.

Beginning on nothing, the Doctor had fought his way up to his present position by dint of sheer perseverance and strength of head. His indomitable will had cleared away all obstacles, and now he was seventy, hale and hearty, a man of wealth and a county magnate.

But Dame Fortune, while she gives with one hand, takes away with the other. The Doctor was now childless, and grandchildless, too, save for James. This man of iron had brought weaklings into the world; his wife had died before she was thirty, and as his riches increased, his brood had one by one faded into the grave. So now, when James—the only son of his eldest son—was in London, Dr Mortimer sat at his mahogany every night all alone—proud, rich, powerful, feared, obeyed on the instant—but alone.

His assistant, M'Pherson, a trustworthy, middle-aged Scotsman, of no especial brilliance, but conscientious to a hair, lived at the asylum and took most of his meals with the patients.

The Doctor had made his will years since, and James was absolutely heir to all he had, save for trifling legacies to his executors and such persons as Hughes, his cook, coachman, and gardeners. Every stick and stone was to be Jim's, and Jim knew it.

But the Doctor was not satisfied with his grandson. Throughout Jim's five years at Rugby the general tenor of his reports had been: "Has done well on the whole, but might have done much better." His hospital career had been of a very similar character. Jim, though of a lazy temperament, had, nevertheless, won warm encomiums from great surgeons for his skill with the knife. Sir Savile Smart, the renowned specialist in abdominal matters, had written to Dr Mortimer—who was an old friend of his—in high praise of Jim. But there, as ever, was the qualifying clause: "Your lad can do wonders when he likes, which isn't always." And then again Jim was given to bursts of rowdyism, accounts of which had trickled down to Threeways, where Jim was regarded as a lovable, harum-scarum youth, who would come into all the Doctor's money, "and so it would be all right." This meant that his wild ways didn't matter—he would never have to earn his living. Besides, he was only a youngster—he would sober down in time. He wouldn't go on fighting policemen all his life—"and so it would be all right."

At dinner on the preceding evening the Doctor, warmed by the generous grape, had been in an affable, not to say confiding mood, and it would have been well for Jim had this been their final conversation ere he departed for town, for the Doctor was in a high good-humour when they lit their bedroom candles, and even went so far as to pat his grandson on the back in a manner that was quite affectionate.

Jim guessed that this amiable frame of mind would decamp with the darkness, and his surmise proved correct, for when he got to the telephone and took the receiver off its peg, he knew by the sound of the Doctor's voice that his grandfather was in an irritable mood.

"Are you there, James?"

"Yes, sir."

"My carriage is waiting, and I must be off in a minute or two, but I want to have a word with you before you go."

"Shall I come across?" suggested Jim,

"No, that will waste time, and I haven't much to say."

It occurred to the Long 'Un that what little his grandfather wished to say would not be of an overwhelmingly genial character.

"I-ah-I received a bill this morning for a plate-glass window you smashed in the Strand about six weeks ago," began the Doctor; "I suppose you recollect it?"

"Seem to remember something of it," replied Jim.

"That's good of you. The bill is for twelve pounds."

"Those big shop windows run into money," hazarded Jim.

"Somewhat superfluous information," snapped the Doctor; "what I want to say is that I won't pay any more of these bills—do you clearly understand?"

"I do," said the Long 'Un.

"And, moreover, I won't have any more of your drunken frolics—it's high time you stopped all that nonsense. I should also advise you to drop the acquaintance of that disreputable reporter friend of yours—he seems to have a bad influence on you—Coke, is that his name?"

Jim chuckled.

"What—Koko? Most harmless man on earth! Gets me out of scrapes, not into them!"

A fresh grievance now occurred to the Doctor. "I am not at all satisfied with the way you are working," he said.

"We dig in pretty hard at Matt's," replied Jim, quite truthfully.

"Yes—but how about your degree? I expect more than a mere qualification from you."

"I'll read like a nigger this time, grandfather—"

"I'm glad to hear you say so," interrupted the Doctor, in a mollified tone.

"Time and weather permitting," concluded Jim, indiscreetly.

A short, ill-tempered cough sounded through the telephone. The Doctor was preparing his ultimatum; Jim's addendum gave him his cue.

"I suppose 'time and weather' mean such dissolute companions as Coker, or whatever his absurd name is. Well, now, attend to me, James. I'm not squeamish,

but I expect you to pull up. I won't have any more playing the fool, either at the hospital or down here. For instance," he added, with growing ire, "what on earth d'you mean by masquerading about the high road in a dressing-gown?"

"I prefer ease to elegance," said Jim, cheekily.

"Well, sir," shouted the Doctor across the vibrating wire, "I don't intend that my grandson shall be taken for one of my patients!"

"Why—who took me for one of them?" demanded Jim in amazement.

"The Countess of Lingfield."

"The who?" exclaimed Jim.

"The Countess of Lingfield. She spoke to you from her carriage half an hour ago."

"By George!" Jim broke into a mellow laugh. "Was that a countess? I say, grandfather, who was the pretty girl with her?"

"Her daughter," replied the Doctor; "and it was she who observed that you were probably one of the 'harmless variety'!"

"Indeed!" said the Long 'Un, not quite so heartily.

"Yes, sir," proceeded the Doctor, his ire rising again, "and I was placed under the ignominious necessity of having to admit that you were my grandson."

"Awfully rough on you, grandpa."

The Doctor was evidently fuming at the other end of the telephone.

"So," was his next utterance, "I shall be obliged if you will behave more like a reasonable being in future. No more window-smashing, no more fighting with policemen, and no more drinking. I give you fair warning that if you cut any more capers, I'll stop supplies, and you'll have to get on as best you can by yourself. Good-bye!"

"Half a moment, sir! I should like to see you again before I go."

"I can't wait."

"Can't you spare a minute, sir?"

"No—I've wasted too much time already talking to you. Now remember! Any more nonsense, and you shan't handle another penny of mine. Good-bye!"

Jim let the receiver go with a bang, and a few moments later was flying across the road, his dressing-gown waving gracefully behind him. But he was too late. He arrived at "Pangora" just in time to see the carriage vanishing through the gates of the drive leading to a by-road on the opposite side of the house.

CHAPTER III.

KOKO REPORTS PROGRESS.

Mr Mortimer was seated at breakfast. His rooms were situated in a terrace leading out of a fashionable thoroughfare in Pimlico, but the terrace itself was not at all fashionable, consisting, as it did, chiefly of lodging-houses resorted to by medical students, clerks, actors, and ladies' maids and men-servants out of places. The keeper of the house was a burly, strident-voiced, strong-willed lady of forty, rough but not unkindly, who always gave Jim what she liked (as opposed to what *he* liked) for breakfast.

This morning—the morning after his arrival in town from Eastfolkshire—his first meal was composed of cold eggs-and-bacon and cold tea—not a deliriously appetising repast, 'tis true; but then, if a man is summoned to breakfast at nine and eventually crawls into his sitting-room at a quarter past ten, what can he expect? And Mrs Freeman was not the sort of lady to keep anything warm for lie-abed lodgers.

Having nibbled half a cold egg, Mortimer turned his attention to the loaf, and eventually breakfasted off bread and marmalade. The butter he eschewed, as it appeared to claim first cousinship with train-oil. As the tea was by this time black, and bitter to the taste, Jim sought to appease his thirst with a bottle of beer from the rickety sideboard. The cork of the bottle being in a state of crumbling decrepitude, Mortimer had to delay his drink while, with the help of a spoon and some expletives, he fished the broken fragments out of the beer.

"A picture," observed a quiet voice, while Jim was thus engaged, "calculated to melt the heart of any maid."

"Hullo—*Koko!*"

"While I object to that nickname," gravely responded the little man who had entered, as he removed his hat and displayed an almost entirely bald head, "I am compelled to reply to it. Well, how are you, young feller?"

Jim replied in a testy murmur that he felt all right, and proceeded to drag more fragments of cork out of the beer. Meanwhile, the man who had come in laid his hat, gloves, and stick on the far end of the table, and then arranged his tie in front of the mirror over the mantelpiece.

"Doocid dude you are, Koko!" said Jim, looking at his friend over the edge of the glass; "why," springing up, "*you've grown!*"

Now, as the caller was but an inch or two over five feet in height, there was every reason why he should have felt congratulated by this remark.

"No," he said, in a resigned voice, "I haven't grown—I've only got some of my fat off."

As Jim towered high above his friend—his height, if anything, accentuated

by the clinging folds of his dressing-gown—the little man gazed admiringly up at the Long 'Un, and deep down in his heart perhaps, heaved a little sigh because of his own smallness. For, alas! Koko had finished growing. He was thirty, and already bald; he was years older than Jim—so was it likely he would grow now? And this was why, and quite naturally, George Somers, reporter on a sporting newspaper—this little, bald, quiet, unassuming man—had come, at first, to notice Jim Mortimer, and afterwards, when they got to know one another, to like him, and, finally, when they became close friends, to give him his whole heart in that sterling regard which men sometimes have for men, when each is sure that the other is worthy of such unflinching esteem.

Koko was neat and dapper in his dress, with nothing awry about him. He was excellently and attractively tidy, with the tidiness that little people have. So well proportioned was he, that his small stature never seemed ridiculous, even when viewed in close juxtaposition to the Long 'Un's great length. Koko was, in countenance, well favoured, with a small, neatly trimmed dark moustache, and rather large, mild eyes. Though generally impassive, his face would at times light up with a wonderful, sudden smile—a smile that it did you good to look upon, a smile that told you that Koko's nature was all gold.

And Koko, you must know, had for some years been inspired with the feeling that it was his particular mission in this world to look after the Long 'Un. Though he had many other duties, and one other hobby, he always found time to keep an almost maternal eye on Jim Mortimer.

"By the way, old boy," said Koko, after a time, "have you unpacked?"

"Only my pyjamas and dressing-gown," said Jim.

"Shall I lend you a hand?"

Mortimer gave a deep laugh.

"Anybody would think I was a blooming kid, Koko, by the way you talk," he said.

"So you are," said Koko, as he made his way to the adjoining bedroom, "in a great many things."

In a leisurely manner the Long 'Un followed after his friend, who was already bending over the unstrapped portmanteau. Mortimer was in a lazy mood, the beer he had consumed having filled him with a feeling of lethargy. Sitting on the end of his bed, he smoked and watched Koko as the latter endeavoured to find his way through the hurly-burly before him—as he took the socks out of the boots in which it was the Long 'Un's custom to pack them, rescued a tin of tooth-powder from the toe of a dancing pump—wherein it had been wedged to ensure safe travelling—fished a razor and shaving-brush out of the sponge-bag, and a sixpenny popular novel from the folds of a fancy waistcoat, put everything into its proper place in the chest of drawers or wardrobe, and at length paused,

his task accomplished, in a somewhat flushed and heated condition.

"First-rate valet you'd make, Koko," said the Long 'Un, ungratefully.

Koko, without replying, pushed the empty portmanteau under the bed, and then washed his hands.

"I must be off now," he said simply.

"Oh, hang on a bit," returned Mortimer, as they went back to the sitting-room.

"Must go," said Koko, smoothing his silk hat with his coat sleeve—"work."

"Where?"

"Billiards in the afternoon, fight in the evening."

And with that he quietly departed.

Nobody would have dreamed that this quiet little man with the bald head had attended and described in nimble boxing terminology some of the fiercest combats that have ever been held at the National Milling Club; nobody would have dreamed that the Mr George Somers, whose hobby was the collecting of old, worm-eaten volumes, and whose initials, "G.S.," were so familiar to the readers of the *Book Hunter*, was a well-known figure in swimming-baths, gymnasiums, billiard saloons, football, and cricket grounds the country over, gun clubs, lacrosse clubs, tennis clubs, and weight-lifting clubs. Yet the little man who nosed round bookstalls in Holywell Street (that was), Wych Street (that was), and St Martin's Lane (that is), in search of rare first editions, was identical with the little man who accompanied Jim on many of his freebooting expeditions "up west," and with the little man who attended sporting functions of every kind all the year round, rain or shine, in the proud capacity of the *Sporting Mail's* "special representative."

When Koko, some hours later, on his return from the billiard match, again looked in on the Long 'Un, he found Mr Mortimer still in his dressing-gown lolling over a book. The table bore the *débris* of Jim's lunch.

As Koko entered the room, Mortimer threw away his book and yawned sluggishly. Koko walked gently up to him, and stood by the arm of his chair.

"I've got a bit of news for you, Jim."

"Go ahead with it."

"I've found out who that girl is."

"What?"

The Long 'Un was out of his chair in a second, all life and fire and eagerness; the transformation was complete.

Koko laughed inwardly; he never laughed out loud.

"Yes, I've found out about her. She's one of the girls at the Milverton Street post-office—she's the girl that takes in the telegrams."

"Are you sure?" exclaimed Jim.

"Certain," said Koko, selecting a cigarette from his little silver case.

Mortimer was struck dumb with delight. For, ever since Koko and he, whilst taking tea at an ABC shop near St Matthew's Hospital, had on three successive occasions observed an extremely handsome girl at a neighbouring table, the Long 'Un had been burning to know the young lady. That was before he went home for a month's vacation. It would appear that Koko, faithful as ever to his friend's interests, had not been idle during that month.

"Come on," exclaimed Jim, "let's go and send off some telegrams. She'll at least be obliged to look at us. That'll be something, won't it?"

"Yes, that'll be something," said Koko; "all right, go and get dressed."

The Long 'Un disappeared into the bedroom, and presently emerged in proper attire.

"You'd better wear your tail coat and top-hat, or I may cut you out," suggested Koko.

With a bellow of laughter, the Long 'Un hurried into his bedroom again, issuing therefrom a minute later clad in the kind of coat and the kind of hat affected by Koko.

"Now," said Koko, as they left Jim's sitting-room, "we start level."

CHAPTER IV.

A HANDMAID TO MERCURY.

Mortimer was in such haste to reach Milverton Street, that it was all Koko could do, with his short legs, to keep pace with him.

"I shall send one to myself to start with," explained Jim, "and then I shall go in at intervals and send wires to you, and the fellows at the hospital."

"Won't you find it rather expensive?"

"My boy, what is money *for*?" exclaimed the Long 'Un with enthusiasm. "Could I employ it better than in—"

"Yes, a good deal better," retorted Koko; "couldn't you go in and buy half-penny stamps, and just *glance* over in her direction?"

"The stamp girl wouldn't like that," returned Mortimer with frank vanity; "but, I say, old man, isn't all this reckoning up of the cost rather sordid?"

"Well, perhaps it is," agreed Koko; "but apart from that, I don't quite see how you can effect anything. She doesn't look the sort of girl you can even discuss the weather with, unless you have been properly introduced to her."

"Never mind that for the present," said Jim. "Try and suggest a suitable telegram for me to send to myself."

"Do you wish to impress her with the fact that you have means?"

"Just as well," said Jim; "I shall have a tidy amount some day, you know."

"Then wire and tell me to put a pot of money for you on a horse."

"And then?"

"Make the next something about shares—'Buy me ten thousand Canadian *Pacific*,' let us say."

"Well, and what's the third wire to be about? I can't put money on gees or buy shares every time."

"Make her jealous. Send a wire to 'Maggie Mortimer' at your Pimlico address, and put 'Best love, darling,' at the end of it," suggested Koko, demurely.

The Long 'Un stopped dead, and faced round on his small companion.

"Look here, Koko," he exclaimed, "I've taken your advice in several—er—affairs of this sort, and they've all turned out badly."

"In each case it was your own fault," said Koko.

"In each case you really managed the business, and it came to nothing. The fact is, you don't know anything about women. You may be all very well at a trotting match—"

"All right," said Koko, shortly, as he turned on his heel, "you can manage this by yourself."

"I apologise," cried Jim.

"In that case," said Koko, relenting, "I'll come. But I don't want you to round on me if it's a failure."

"I promise I won't," the Long 'Un declared, and so once more Koko stretched his short legs to the utmost in order to keep in step with Jim.

Miss Dora Maybury was quite one of the handsomest girls that ever obtained employment—by competitive examination—in the London Post-Office. It was, therefore, not at all surprising that the susceptible Jim Mortimer should have been so affected by her beauty. Dora's hair was chestnut brown; the dreamy depths of her dark eyes were fringed o'er with long lashes, from beneath whose graceful shadow she gazed upon the world with an expression that was at once distracting and unconsciously coquettish; her lips closed in exquisite lines upon teeth that were as white as you could wish them to be; and the whole form of her face—from forehead to chin—was such as the most censorious judge of a human countenance would not have desired to be other than what it was. Dora was tall, too, and of graceful figure—in brief, she was as comely a maid as you could well behold in a year's journeying.

It sometimes occurs that a girl brought up in luxury finds herself suddenly plunged into genteel poverty. Such was the case with Dora. Not so very long since she had lived in a great house, and ridden in carriages; then Fortune, in a sudden freak of fancy, had turned her back upon her, and, as if by a sweep of a fairy's wand, the mansion had changed to much humbler quarters in London, and the carriages into penny and halfpenny omnibuses.

It was natural that the unusually prepossessing girl behind the counter of the post-office in Milverton Street should attract a good deal of attention. Those who had occasion to send away telegrams pretty often—busy, preoccupied men though most of them were—soon came to notice this particular clerk's refined voice and manner. She had not been engaged in post-office work long enough to have acquired the slap-dash, curt style of the lady-clerk who has sat at the telegraphic seat of custom for several years; she was still sufficiently of an amateur, indeed, to display some human interest in many of the messages which were handed in to her. Not that a telegraph clerk is supposed to do this; but Dora could not forbear a smile when she was counting the many words of a wire from a love-sick swain to his lady-love, nor could she feel quite indifferent when a telegram bearing the direst ill-news—news of grave illness or even death—passed through her hands.

But we do not wish to have it supposed that we are holding up Dora Maybury as an angel of pity—or, indeed, as a perfect character in any sense. When business was slack, and Dora had time to think about herself, a pettish and discontented expression might often have been observed to flit across her pretty face. As a post-office clerk, Dora felt that she was not filling her proper niche in the world—and probably a good many other people thought so too.

There were five other girls behind the counter of the Milverton Street post-office, in addition to telegraphists in the room above, several male clerks, and a small gang of telegraph boys. Dora's great friend among the other girls was Rose Cook, a fat, good-natured, sentimental creature, who was at present desperately in love with a gentleman she had met at a dance—a Mr Somers, who wrote for the newspapers. Mr Somers was a friend of some friends of Miss Cook's, and that was how she had come to meet him, and to hear of his very tall friend, Mr Mortimer. But it should be added that Mr Somers had seen very little of Miss Cook, had no idea of the passion that consumed her, and was certainly wholly ignorant of the fact that she was employed in the Milverton Street post-office. He had only been in this particular post-office once in his life, and then he had had eyes for none save the young lady who took in the telegrams.

Now, earlier in this very day that witnessed the journey of the Long 'Un and Koko to Milverton Street, Miss Cook had been bemoaning the fact that "Mr Somers" had actually been in the post-office a few days previously, and had not

so much as glanced at her.

"He was looking at *you*—they all do!" she had exclaimed, while discussing the matter at lunch with Dora.

Dora made no reply, but she was thinking over Miss Cook's complimentary complaint later that day, when a very tall man entered the post-office and proceeded to one of the compartments where telegram forms and pointless pencils attached to pieces of string were supplied for the convenience of the public.

Dora noticed that the tall man occasionally glanced towards the door, and presently began to beckon to somebody who was presumably standing in the doorway. After a time the person beckoned to entered the post-office, and, as he did so, Miss Cook, who was sitting next to Dora, gave vent to a little gasp.

"What's the matter, dear?" inquired Dora.

"That—that's—Mr Somers!" exclaimed Miss Cook.

"And who is the other?" asked Dora, who was not greatly impressed by Mr Somers's appearance.

"That must be his friend, Mr Mortimer."

Quite unconscious of the fact that their identity was no secret in the post-office, the Long 'Un and Koko proceeded to compile telegrams.

"What a lot of forms Mr Mortimer is tearing up!" whispered Dora to her friend.

"Evidently sending a telegram to a girl," replied Miss Cook, who was still looking agitated, and whose thoughts were naturally trending in a sentimental direction.

Dora smiled. The sight of Koko standing on tip-toe, and craning his head over the Long 'Un's arm, was certainly smile-inspiring. So Dora smiled.

Presently Mortimer withdrew his head and shoulders from the compartment, and turned towards the counter. It should be added that the various communications suggested by Koko had all been condemned as worthless by the Long 'Un, who, with some pains, had finally evolved the following bald and uninspiring message: "*Annie arrives nine to-night. Please meet. Jim.*"

Koko turned towards the counter at the same time as Jim, and as he did so his face underwent a striking change. For there, gazing ardently upon him, sat Miss Rose Cook. In a flash Koko took in the situation, and saw that here was Jim's chance. He could introduce Jim straight away.

It was too late to stop Jim from sending the telegram, for he was already handing in the message and gazing with undisguised admiration at Miss Maybury. And as Miss Maybury bent her beautiful head over the form, and with a swiftly moving—far too swiftly moving—pencil, proceeded to count the words thereon, Jim's heart thumped wildly against his ribs, Jim's brain seemed to reel,

and Jim fell head over ears—hopelessly, irretrievably—IN LOVE.

CHAPTER V. JIM REJOICES.

Five minutes later Jim Mortimer was sailing down Milverton Street in a state of mild delirium. Instead of having to wait for months for an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the girl whose face had so captivated his fancy, the whole thing had been accomplished in a briefer time than it takes to write of it.

Koko it was who had effected this desirable consummation—Koko who had offered up himself on the altar of friendship. Koko saw as plain as daylight that Miss Cook was exceedingly pleased to see him, and knew that the introduction he contemplated would result in his having to meet with undesirable frequency a lady in whom he took no interest whatever. A few words of greeting were exchanged; then Miss Cook—who had an axe of her own to grind—introduced him to Miss Maybury, and then, as a matter of course, Koko made Mortimer known to the two girls.

Dora Maybury! So that was her name! What a sweet name! *Dora!* The Long 'Un dwelt lovingly on those two dear syllables.

He proceeded to murmur the name in an abstracted manner until they reached St Matthew's Hospital. Here Jim's hosts of friends greeted him in the heartiest fashion, and bottled beer flowed freely in the students' common-room. Koko knew many of Jim's friends, and always enjoyed himself when in the company of the light-hearted happy-go-lucky crew at "Matt's." Jim sat down and rattled off a comic song on a piano which, by reason of much hard usage, had long since lost its purity of tone. Jim played cleverly by ear; and, as he could sing songs by the score, he was consequently the star artiste of "Matt's."

"Chorus, boys!" he roared, and the boys, forming up in a line behind a red-haired youth from Wales—with a voice worthy of his nationality—pranced round the table as they let go the taking refrain at the top of their voices:—

Oh, follow the man from Cook's!
The wonderful man from Cook's!
And, whether your stay be short or long,
You'll see the sights, for he can't go wrong.

Oh, follow the man from Cook's!
 The wonderful man from Cook's!
 For it's twenty to one that there's plenty of fun,
 If you follow the man from Cook's!

The last words of the chorus were ringing out into the quadrangle, when a porter entered the room and informed the pianist that a lady wished to see him.

"Lady!" exclaimed Jim.

"Yes, sir; wishes to see you very particular."

"Go on, Long 'Un!" yelled the students, "next verse."

But Jim's head was filled with romantic ideas. What if, for some strange, inexplicable reason, it should happen to be Dora! True, it was not very likely, but he had read in books of things like this happening.

"Half a second, you men," he said; "I've got to see somebody."

"Girl?" queried the red-haired youth from Wales.

But Jim (hoping it was) hurried out without replying to him. He found his fair visitor to be no other than Mrs Freeman, his landlady.

"Mr Mortimer, sir," she said, in some agitation, "this came for you just now, sir. I hope it's not bad news, sir."

For in the homely eyes of the landlady a telegram generally loomed large as a portent of ill. Jim opened the flimsy envelope, and read:

"Annie arrives nine to-night. Please meet. Jim."

Until this moment he had forgotten all about the wire he had sent himself. Now it had reached him in all its imbecile meaninglessness.

Mrs Freeman regarded his face anxiously.

"Not bad news, I 'ope, sir?"

Jim crushed the thing into his pocket somewhat impatiently.

"No; it's all right, thanks, Mrs Freeman. It's—it's nothing. Thanks for bringing it."

And so Mrs Freeman had to retrace her steps to Pimlico, feeling (it must be confessed) somewhat disappointed at the non-tragic contents of the message she had so carefully conveyed to the hospital.

Jim imbibed more beer and sang more songs, and finally, when the party broke up, dragged Koko off to dine at the Trocadero. All through the meal Jim was excessively merry, his bursts of laughter causing many of the diners to glance curiously in his direction. Koko, knowing by long experience that he could do nothing to stem Jim's methods of letting off steam, decided that his place to-night

must be by Mortimer's side; so he hastily scribbled a note asking a colleague to report the fight at the National Milling Club for which he (Koko) had been booked, and despatched it to the *Sporting Mail* office by a special messenger. Koko felt easier in his mind when he had done this; he saw that Jim intended to make a night of it, and that his programme would be a variegated one.

Dinner over, the Long 'Un hailed a hansom, and, Koko having stowed himself away inside, took his place with a brief "Exhibition!" to the driver.

"Dora!" breathed Jim, as the cab sped across the Circus and headed for Piccadilly.

"I expect she likes nice, quiet men," said Koko.

"Not she," returned Jim with conviction.

"A nice, quiet, home-loving man—not a man who shouts, and swears, and behaves like an over-grown schoolboy," persisted Mr George Somers.

"You're very severe to-night, my bald-headed young friend," quoth the Long 'Un, with supreme good-humour.

"Never mind about *my* head," said Koko; "think what *yours* will be like in the morning."

"But it is to-night!" cried the Long 'Un, "it is to-night, and I mean to go the whole hog. Let the morning take care of itself. It is to-night; I have seen her; I *know* her; and now I am enjoying myself very much."

"You are also," added Koko, "on the verge of intoxication."

"Very near the verge," whooped the Long 'Un.

The cab was approaching Hyde Park Corner when Jim raised the little trap-door above his head.

"I've changed my mind, cabby; drive back to the Empire."

"Empire? Yessir!"

"You'll be chucked out of there to a certainty," said Koko, despairingly.

"Not me," said Jim.

But at the music-hall Mortimer was politely refused admittance by a man as tall as himself, and considerably broader.

"No, sir; you gave us trouble the last time you were here. I haven't forgotten you, sir."

"But that was Boat Race night," protested Jim.

"No matter, sir; can't let you in."

And the official squared his great shoulders and glanced at another official, almost as big as himself, who was standing a few yards away. Simultaneously Koko gave Jim's sleeve a tug.

"Come on," he said; "no good getting into a row."

Reluctantly Jim turned on his heel; he was in a mood for battle, and he had an idea that, big as the official was, he (Jim) could have rendered a pretty good

account of himself had it come to a scrap.

The cab they had employed was lingering in the vicinity of the entrance. Jim hailed it and again gave the order "Exhibition." And in the course of thirty minutes or so, Koko and he found themselves passing through the turnstiles at that popular resort.

Very pleasant it was, too, sauntering through the bazaars and make-believe old streets, and round the band-stands, while eye and ear were charmed with colour and music respectively, and the promenading multitude laughed and chattered, forgetting the day's cares in a spell of enjoyable indolence.

But Jim was bent on celebrating the great event of the day—his introduction to Miss Maybury. He was desirous of applying more rebellious liquor to his young blood, and intimated the fact to a little Swiss waiter.

"*Dora!*" Jim gave the toast and drained his glass at a gulp. Up came Carlo again with a smile of appreciation. "As before," said Jim, and again toasted Dora.

Just then a pale, well-dressed young man, passing by in the company of two ladies, trod on Jim's outstretched foot. Jim gave vent to an exclamation, but the doer of the harm simply glanced over his shoulder without vouchsafing an apology.

"Why don't you look after your feet, sir!" cried Jim, angrily. To do him justice, he did not notice the presence of the ladies.

The perambulating crowd was thick just there, and the proprietor of the feet alluded to was brought to a standstill close to Jim by people coming in the opposite direction.

"It is never nice here," he observed to one of his companions in a tone evidently intended to reach Jim's ears, "on early closing nights."

For all Jim knew, the man who had trodden on his toes was making this remark to another man, but Koko had noticed the ladies, and now perceived that while one of them was regarding Jim with haughty disfavour, the other kept her face turned resolutely towards the bandstand.

"I'll show you what sort of a shop-boy I am!" exclaimed Jim, in a fury, and was jumping up when his leg got into difficulties with the little round table at which he was sitting, the result being that he fell over and broke the back of the chair he was occupying. In his struggle to retain his balance he swept the glasses off the table and smashed them, and, when the little Swiss waiter requested payment for the goods, rudely declined to give any compensation.

When the waiter beckoned to a policeman, men sitting at neighbouring tables rose to their feet, evidently expecting trouble. People in the vicinity stopped promenading, in order to look on. They talked about what followed for days afterwards.

The constable was not one of the gentlest of his species. He asked Jim for

his name and address, and Jim produced his card; then the policeman told him he must leave the Exhibition, and, as Jim appeared reluctant to obey this order, gave him a push in the direction of the nearest exit.

Now, the policeman, regarding Jim's long, slim form, had not anticipated much trouble from this customer. How was he to know that Mr James Mortimer (that being the name on the card) had a marvellous way of hitting straight from the shoulder? Rough and unscientific he might be, but his blows came pat like a donkey's kicks, and hurt almost as much.

When the policeman had picked himself up and blown his whistle, the bystanders fairly tingled with excitement. They saw a little man urging the tall one to submit quietly, and they saw the tall man shake off the little man as one would brush away a fly. The tall man's hat had fallen off, and the little man was holding it. The tall man was a good-looking fellow, the bystanders remarked, and as he drew himself up, and glared defiance at the approaching enemy, he reminded certain spectators of some heroic subject in sculpture or painting. Of course, this was because they were inclined to be romantic. The bulk of those present saw in Jim merely a young man the worse for drink and spoiling for a fight.

A burly sergeant strode up.

"Now, then, none of this nonsense," he said roughly.

Crack! That peculiar straight left met him on the jaw, and the sergeant collapsed on to the gravel. Two more policemen rushed at Jim. Again the long arms shot out. One policeman fell, and the other staggered. Jim followed the latter up and delivered the *coup de grâce*. At that moment Jim felt a muscular hand gripping his neck. He lashed round furiously, then closed with his antagonist, and they fell among the chairs. Jim was on top, and wrenched himself free as a fifth policeman charged at him. A bit of a boxer was this man, young and active, and Jim and he hammered each other with the lustiness of schoolboys. Up and down among the chairs they went, and then Jim, seeing an opening, got home on the point, and turned swiftly to receive the sixth policeman, an enormous fellow who was unfortunately given to over-much beer. He hit Jim on the chest, and Jim gasped; then he hit at Jim again, and Jim, dodging the blow, retaliated with a sledge-hammer slap across the back of the big man's neck. The big man clutched at a table, and Jim hit him in the spine and upset man and table. Then three policemen, sore and furious, rushed at Jim together, and there was Jim's close-clipped poll towering above them, and there were Jim's long arms dealing out donkey kicks, and leaving marks every time. And then Jim retired in good order, face and fists to the foe, towards the buffet, and then, suddenly altering his tactics, he put his head down and butted the middle man of the trio in the stomach, and so made his way through them, and ran into the burly sergeant, who hit at Jim with his truncheon, but missed him, and got a crashing blow in

the mouth by way of exchange. And that was Jim's last good donkey kick, for one of them got him by the leg, another hit him over the hip with his truncheon, and next moment Jim was rolling about the gravel with four of them clinging to him. And, of course, he at length surrendered, and was marched off between two of the policemen to the police-station, the faithful Koko following a few yards behind to bail him out.

CHAPTER VI. THE DOCTOR KEEPS HIS WORD.

The whole fight did not last two minutes. It was short, sharp, and, to sport-loving members of the crowd, very sweet. Certain pugilistic souls among the visitors to the Exhibition went home that night and dreamt about it. Many of the women, it is true, shuddered, and clutched convulsively at the arms of their male companions as Jim's mighty hits went home and the policemen, by turn, bit the dust of the promenading ground, but quite a number watched the combat with bright, marvelling eyes, and lips parted half in admiration and half in horror.

For Jim looked very handsome and terrible in his fighting wrath. One old gentleman who had come from his club dinner in evening dress to listen to the band, returned to St James's Street chuckling with delight. Numbers of times he repeated to himself, "A bonny lad—a bonny lad!" and actually, instead of going home and to bed at a respectable hour, as an old gentleman of his years and gouty tendencies should have done, fought the battle over again at great length for the benefit of some other old club fogies, and finally had to be helped into a cab—at 2 A.M.—still chuckling with wicked joy.

It was, of course, a tremendous output of nervous energy—accentuated by the spirits he had imbibed—on Jim's part. It was a supreme effort, and died out suddenly. That smash over the hip—a policeman's favourite aiming-point—from the truncheon numbed him strangely, and when he fell, his capture was an easy matter. There was no more fight left in him when they led him off—he would have gone with entire docility, indeed, without a hand being laid on him.

Arrived at the police-station, he was conducted into the charge-room and placed in the narrow little dock facing the inspector's desk. The inspector, a quiet-looking man, glanced up in a casual fashion and then proceeded with the writing on which he was employed when they entered. This done, he inquired

what the charge was, and, on being informed of its nature in the curt, unadorned phraseology of the man in blue, entered the particulars on a charge-sheet that lay before him, and finally allowed Koko to bail his friend out for £2.

Those who had witnessed the conflict would have been astonished by the inspector's imperturbable, cool tone, as he asked his brief questions. It was regarded as a matter-of-course case—youthful "medical"—too much to drink—dispute with waiter—resisted police. All very ordinary—very matter-of-course—nothing out of the way. The inspector even said "Good-night, sir," as Jim left the charge-room with Koko; previously the inspector had gazed at the ceiling as Jim presented a sovereign to his two custodians, who also bade him a "Good-night, sir," in a manner which showed that they bore him not the slightest ill-will on account of the hard usage they had received at his hands.

On the following day, Jim and Koko attended at the police-court and hung about in a fusty corridor for two hours before the name "Mortimer" was sharply called, and Jim, frock-coated, neatly gloved, and with a new hat in his hand, walked into the dock. Then the sergeant who had taken part in the fracas told his tale in the same unadorned manner of speech that his subordinate had used on the previous night.

"Anything to say?" inquired the magistrate, glancing at Jim.

"Nothing, your worship," replied Jim, who had been previously warned by Koko that "the less said the better" was a golden maxim to adopt on an occasion like the present.

[image]

"I HAVE NOTHING TO SAY, YOUR WORSHIP."

The magistrate, who for two hours had been hearing the usual sordid charges—most of them associated with petty thefts and drunkenness—had been somewhat interested by the sergeant's account of what Jim had done. Now, as he looked at Jim's tall, lithe form, and fair, open countenance, and noted Jim's gentlemanly bearing, he decided to give the young fellow a seasonable word of advice.

"I am sorry to see you here, Mortimer," he said, "because a man of your position, by acting as you have done, not only sets a bad example, but runs the risk of imperilling the success of his future career. You have rendered yourself liable to a term of imprisonment, and you know well that if I were to inflict such a punishment on you the fact would act as a serious obstacle to you hereafter, as you would not be allowed to fill any responsible medical post were it known that

you had been in prison. It appears from the evidence that you were the worse for drink at the time you resisted the police. I need hardly remind you of the view the public take of a medical man who gives way to such habits. It means, in the long run, utter ruin to him. As I said before, I should be acting within my rights by sending you to prison, but as I understand that after you had been taken into custody you gave the police no further trouble, I shall only inflict a fine upon you. You will pay forty shillings—and take care I don't see you here again."

Jim bowed. "I am greatly obliged to your worship," he said. Then, at a sign from a policeman stationed near by, he quitted the dock, and, having paid his fine, joined Koko in the corridor.

They lose no time in London police-courts. Hardly had Jim left the dock than the name of "Hodgkins" was uttered by the magistrate's clerk, repeated by the sergeant, bawled down the corridor by the constable at the door, and echoed by other policemen lounging in the outer precincts of the court.

"Hodgkins!"

"*Hodgkins!*"

"HODGKINS!"

As Jim joined Koko, a blear-eyed, decrepit old dame brushed past him at a rapid hobble. She had to answer a summons for assaulting a neighbour by striking her over the head with a fire-shovel. This, in fact, was "Hodgkins."

As Jim glanced at the old creature he realised that this quarrelsome, ill-favoured hag and he were companions in distress—united by a law-breaking bond! He, inflamed by whisky, had fought six policemen; she, supping cheap gin, had burst into a senile frenzy and set upon some other hag with her claw-like nails and the weapon that came first to hand. The same law applied to both of them—she, a rag-picker, and he, the heir to a bountiful fortune and many smiling acres in Eastfolkshire.

"Pah!" he exclaimed, as he hastened to reach cleaner air, "let's get out of this! Thank goodness *that's* over!"

"No harm done," said Koko, cheerily. "I know the two men in the reporters' box, and they both promised not to write a word about you."

"By George! that's jolly of them!" exclaimed the Long 'Un. "My grand-guv'nor won't get to hear of it after all, then."

"It would have made a tasty little par," said Koko, with a pressman's instinctive knowledge of what newspapers like.

"It would," said Jim. "I can imagine how it would have read."

"But they won't write a word. They're good sorts," said Koko.

And so the Long 'Un made his way back to Matt's, lighter, it is true, of purse, but very much lighter of heart as well, than when he set out to the police-court that morning.

News of Jim's display of pugilistic prowess had preceded him to the hospital—for one of the students had been an eye-witness of the battle—and he was saluted by the unruly crew there with acclamation. But Jim still had the taste of the police-court air in his mouth, and did not feel at all heroic. But for Koko's intervention his name would have been in a good many papers on the following day, and perhaps a briefer notice of "Hodgkins" and her misuse of domestic implements would have followed the account of the young doctor's "disorderly conduct."

That day he went home early, and tried to do some reading. He ended up, however, by going to a theatre with Koko. On the next evening he really did do some reading, and this studious fit lasted for quite a week.

"The Long 'Un," said the red-haired student at Matt's, "is turning over a new leaf. I will buy him a prize."

When Jim, on reaching the hospital next day, entered the students' common-room, he found a neat package, addressed to himself, occupying a prominent position on the mantelpiece. On opening the package he found that it consisted of a nice little one-and-sixpenny book, of the kind published by religious societies, entitled "Jim's Repentance: *The Story of a Bad Boy Who Saw the Evils of His Ways.*"

The red-haired youth took the precaution of putting the table between himself and the Long 'Un ere he said: "Had to go through a catalogue before I found a suitable prize for you, Jim. Girl in the shop helped me."

Jim flung it at his head.

"Naughty, angry Jim!" said the red-haired student, reprovingly, as he dodged the book. "I shall take your prize away from you now."

Presently Jim found himself at the piano, and a little later out in the quad with the red-haired one and half-a-dozen others, "wondering what to do."

Eventually they solved the problem by going to a music-hall and joining vociferously in the choruses—it was one of those music-halls where the audience *does* join in the choruses—and the end of it was that Jim got home sometime between one and two in the morning, feeling uncommonly merry and not at all repentant.

But that was Jim's last night round the town with the Matt's lot. Even while he was chirruping choruses, an epistle was winging its way towards him by express train. He got that missive at breakfast time, and Koko, who called in just then, found him looking thoughtful.

"Read that," he said to Koko. And Koko read as follows:—

"Pangora," Threeways,

Sept. 20th.

MY DEAR JAMES,—You may possibly remember that in the course of the conversation I held with you over the telephone on the day of your departure for town, I expressed myself quite plainly with regard to your future conduct. My attention has to-day been drawn to a paragraph in the local Liberal journal—I am, as you know, a Conservative in politics—to the effect that a medical man named James Mortimer, who gave his address as St Matthew’s Hospital, behaved in a disgraceful fashion at the Exhibition one night earlier in the month, and was eventually fined forty shillings and severely reprimanded by the magistrate. As I happen to know that you are the only Mortimer at St Matthew’s, and as I am aware of your liking for drunken brawls, I can only conclude that you disregarded my injunctions at the first opportunity that presented itself. I am obliged, therefore, to keep my part of the compact by informing you that my doors are henceforth closed to you, and that you need never look to me for another penny.

I am,
Your affectionate grandfather,
JOHN MORTIMER.

CHAPTER VII. SIR SAVILE’S OFFER.

”But,” said Koko as he handed the letter back to Jim, ”how on earth did your local rag get hold of it? I’ve seen both my friends since, and they assured me they didn’t write a line about you.”

”I give it up,” said Jim; ”the fact remains that the old man has got wind of it.”

”But isn’t this action on his part a bit sudden?” demanded Koko.

”He said he would,” said Jim, munching a piece of watercress (Mrs Freeman’s unvarying Tuesday breakfast was ham and watercress), ”but I didn’t think he meant it.”

”Perhaps he doesn’t mean it,” said Koko, hopefully.

”I am very much afraid,” returned Jim, ”that he does, though. You see, he was already wild with me, as he had had to stump up for that big window I

broke—you remember! Twelve quid—that was the bill. He told me about it over the telephone. I wish I'd been able to have a square talk with him, face to face; he wouldn't have been half so wild, I put all this down to that rotten telephone."

"Don't quite perceive how it's to blame," said Koko.

"Don't you! Why, if he tackled me face to face, I could have filled him up with all sorts of promises of reformation, and sent him off for his drive feeling sorry that I was going away. Instead of which he went off in a beastly huff. I should have reminded him—as touching the window—that some fellows charge their paters and grandpaters hundreds and even thousands. I should have explained that twelve pounds was a very light let-off. Hang the telephone!"

"The question is," said Koko, "do you think he means it?"

"Yes," replied the Long 'Un, with conviction.

"Then," continued the other, "what are you going to do?"

"I dunno! Turn sporting reporter very likely!"

"Well," said Koko, "with your knowledge of sporting matters you might be able to earn about twelve and sixpence a week just now—say by reporting football matches. That would hardly keep a man of your expensive tastes."

Jim laughed.

"Couldn't I do the fights at the National?" he suggested.

"No, my boy; you've had no experience—of reporting, I mean. But, seriously, Jim, can't you get a doctoring job?"

"I shall have a look round for something," said Jim.

Koko gazed at the ceiling.

"If it hadn't been for that girl," he mused sorrowfully, "this would never have happened. You were off your head about her—"

"Absolutely!" agreed Jim.

Koko sighed. "Women are always at the bottom of man's undoing. Avoid them in future, Jim."

"Not I," said Jim; "I'm not built that way."

"Well, you've lost any chance you had of getting this one," said Koko.

Jim's face fell.

"By George! I hadn't thought of that. I'm glad I didn't send that wire about Canadian Pacifics. We shall meet on more level terms now."

"Upon my word," said Koko, "I think you are the most optimistic man I have ever met. Here are you—disowned—kicked out—cut off without a shilling by your grandfather—and you are still thinking—"

"I still hope," breathed Jim, devoutly.

Mr Somers walked towards the door. However, he turned back to say one more thing.

"If, Jim, you should find it necessary to approach another kind of relative—"

-”

”I fear I shall find it necessary,” sighed the Long ’Un.

”I was going to say,” continued Koko, ”that if you want to pawn anything, I’ll pawn it for you. I can nip in easier than you.” And with that he went quietly on his way.

Having shaved and dressed, Jim set out, as a matter of course, for the hospital. As he walked along he reviewed the situation, and the awkwardness of his present plight became clearly apparent to him.

Yesterday he was the heir to a fortune and a flourishing practice. (The asylum he left out of his calculations, as he was aware that a private institution of this kind can now—according to the law of the land—only descend from father to son, and on the death of the latter must cease to exist.) To-day he was a young man of four-and-twenty, with a medical qualification, various surgical implements, a small collection of well-thumbed works relating to his craft, a sufficient wardrobe, and some thirty shillings in cash. Thus provided, the world was before him, and he was wondering what sort of a job he and the world would make of it, when, as he blundered absent-mindedly round the corner of the street in which St Matthew’s Hospital was situated, he ran plump into the stalwart form of Sir Savile Smart, the eminent specialist of whom mention has already been made.

”What—*Mortimer!*”

”How do you do, Sir Savile?”

The great man’s moustache hid a smile as he observed: ”And how many more policemen’s helmets have you added to your collection?”

Jim blushed.

”You’ll get a fine wiggling from your grandfather if he hears of your latest adventure,” added Sir Savile.

”He *has* heard of it, sir,” said Jim, and forthwith told the specialist of what had befallen him.

Sir Savile bit his moustache.

”No hope of a reprieve, I suppose?”

”No hope whatever, I fear,” said Jim.

Sir Savile hailed a cab. ”I’m due at Harley Street in fifteen minutes, but I can talk to you on the way.”

He laid his hand kindly on the Long ’Un’s arm as the cab approached them, and to Jim’s credit be it said that he felt, at that moment, that he had more good friends than he deserved to have.

”Practically,” said Sir Savile, as the cab sped westwards, ”you want a billet?”

Jim ruefully acknowledged that he couldn’t live on air.

”You want a billet? Good. I’ve got one for you.”

He pulled a letter out of his pocket.

"My friend Taplow—the ladies' doctor' they call him—has a surgery over the water. As you may know, it's not an uncommon thing for a man with a fat West-end practice to run a shilling and six-penny shop in the slums. Anything for money, Mortimer! Well, as I said, he's got a surgery over the water—in the Blackfriars district—and he wants a man to look after it. He'll pay about a hundred and twenty a year. Any good to you?"

"Better than living on air," said Jim.

"Experience, too," continued Sir Savile; "heaps. It's a rough, poverty-stricken quarter—very rough. You'll make acquaintance with the masses. The man lately in charge of the place was not quite up to the work—too old. And he was unfortunate in his end—"

"End?" said Jim. "Is he dead, then?"

"Dead as a door-nail."

"What did he die of?" queried Jim.

"Boots and knives. He was killed by Hooligans."

The Long 'Un opened his eyes wide.

"Perhaps," said Sir Savile, "you will now think that even living on air is better than risking one's chances of living on anything?"

"Not at all, sir," said Jim, stoutly; "I'm quite willing to take it on."

"I believe you are. Well, go and try it. Taplow's out of town, and has asked me to put somebody in temporarily. I will put you in. Any morbid objections to sleeping in your predecessor's bedroom?"

"None at all," said Jim.

"Right! You had better go to the place where he lodged, then. The surgery has no living rooms attached to it—it's just a surgery and waiting-room. When we get to Harley Street I'll give you full particulars. Quite sure you don't mind going?"

"Quite," replied Jim.

"I do like a man that knows his own mind," said the specialist in a tone of approval. "You needn't stay there for ever, you know—you're too good for that sort of work."

Jim blushed again.

"Still, it'll tide you over the present difficulty. That's the point. Ah, yes—and I must also give you the address of the place where you're to lodge. Better send them a wire. House is about ten minutes' walk from the surgery; people are gentfolk, I believe—family—come down in the world. I remember Taplow speaking of them to me—knows something of them, and recommended his man there. One of the daughters is a post-office clerk—very pretty—that'll suit you, eh?"

"I intend to devote myself entirely to work in future, sir," said Jim.

"Ah, yes! Quite so—quite so!" said the specialist chuckling. "Let's see, yes—I recollect—the name is—er—Marcombe—Mayflower—*Maybury*—that's it."

Jim uttered an exclamation.

"Eh?—what?" inquired Sir Savile.

"N—nothing, sir, nothing!"

"Oh," returned the specialist, "I thought you were going to say something."

CHAPTER VIII.

NUMBER NINE.

Before the era of cheap train services, omnibuses, and trams—when the outer London suburbs of to-day were smiling meadowland, and people talked of Hampstead "village"—there were many residential quarters within a walk of the City on both the Middlesex and Surrey sides of the river. But with the growth of steam power arose great factories, and as fast as these central residential quarters were swept away by commerce, rows and rows of new streets swallowed up the fields that fringed Suburbia, and afforded accommodation to those whose homes in the heart of London were being razed to the ground.

But some of these quiet old squares and crescents have survived to this day, and you may still find them here and there, sadly shorn of the respectable family appearance they wore in their youth, and hemmed in by huge and ugly business barracks from whose grimy windows issue the whirr and hiss and thud of machinery, the monotonous clacking of type-writers, and the continuous patter of footsteps on iron-shod stairs.

These architectural survivors of a day when the world, humanly speaking, did not go round so fast—when the *Times* received news by "electric telegraph," and issued bulletins of various interest supplied by "Mr Reuter's" special service—nowadays look like faded old maids, for their exterior smartness is gone and their interior arrangement smack of a time when it never occurred to a builder to put a bathroom in a house, for the simple reason that he did not know how to convey hot water to it, save by means of a can. In some of them each floor is occupied by a separate family, while in others you may perceive the familiar dreary legend "Apartments to Let" on a card which hangs disconsolately in the fanlight over the door.

Such a crescent as we have described is Derby Crescent, which is situated

but a stone's throw from the bustling thoroughfare that leads from Blackfriars Bridge to the "Elephant," and thence on and away to the Old Kent Road, itself suggestive of coach and chaise and the days of our grandfathers. Why Derby Crescent escaped demolition when Dame Commerce stretched out her long, lean, hungry hand and grabbed wide acres of comfortable homesteads for her building needs, nobody can tell you. But it remained, while its neighbouring squares and crescents vanished; and so, when William Maybury cotton spinner, of Manchester, was declared a bankrupt, he was glad to hide his head in one of the two houses which belonged to his wife in this self-same area. It was his second wife, for his first had died whilst still pretty and youthful. And it may be added that he had long since repented his second matrimonial venture, in spite of the houses and money the lady brought with her as a marriage portion.

To No. 9, therefore, he removed such goods and chattels as he was able to save from the wreck of his luxurious house in Manchester, and at No. 9 he had been residing for three years when Jim Mortimer rattled up in a cab a few hours after his talk with Sir Savile, and announced his arrival by plying a knocker that, like the house it belonged to, had seen very much better days.

After some delay the door was opened by a slatternly maid of tender years, for her hair still hung down her back in a plaited queue.

The girl surveyed Jim, and then said, "Are you the new boarder, please?" Then, before Jim could reply, she turned swiftly round and exclaimed, in a shrill voice, "Oh, shut *hup*, Master Frank!"

A boyish laugh rang out, and Jim, peering into the gloomy hall, perceived a lad aged about fourteen accoutred in Etons a good deal the worse for wear—apparently harmony reigned at No. 9 as far as appearances went—with a gleeful smirk on his face.

"Yes," said Jim, "I am Mr Mortimer."

"Will you come in, please?" the girl rejoined, and again swished round to remonstrate with her tormentor. "Give *hover*, Master Frank—I'll tell your ma, I will!"

"Sneak!" observed the amiable young gentleman addressed.

"Leave my 'air alone, then!"

Jim turned round and bade the cabman bring his portmanteau into the house, and as the cabman, with much heavy breathing, deposited the portmanteau in the hall, a large, middle-aged lady emerged from one of the sitting-rooms and treated the new boarder to a gracious smile.

"Dr Mortimer, I presume?"

Jim bowed.

"Sir Savile Smart was so kind as to wire—as well as you—and tell us that you were coming to take poor Dr Morgan's place. Very sad, was it not? Such a nice,

quiet old gentleman! But it's only old gentlemen and women that these cowardly Hooligans venture to touch—indeed, we hardly dare go out after dark! It gave us a great shock when we heard of what had happened to Dr Morgan. The poor dear gentleman was really past work, and must have fallen an easy prey to the ruffians. My husband is not so young as he was, and I often feel nervous lest something should happen to him! He makes me very cross by refusing to carry a life-preserver. Every evening I expect to see his mangled corpse brought to the door. If we could afford to, we should move out of this dreadful neighbourhood, but there! people must live where they can live! When my husband met with his reverses, you see, Dr Mortimer, our thoughts naturally turned to Derby Crescent, where we could live rent free, as my dear mother left me her property in this—but your cabman is waiting, Dr Mortimer, and no doubt you wish to dismiss him!”

During her flight of eloquence the cabman had been regarding Mrs Maybury with a most grim and forbidding expression on his face. Jim, remembering that he had left his overcoat in the cab, walked back to the vehicle with him.

“What’s the damage, cabby?” inquired the Long ’Un, when he had secured his coat.

“Leave it to you, sir.”

Jim gave him sixpence over his fare. Over-paying cabmen had always been a weakness of his.

“Much obliged, sir!” The cabman touched his hat and pocketed the silver. “Wish you luck of your new quarters, sir.”

“Thanks, cabby,” said Jim.

“The way to treat ’er,” continued the cabman, indicating the house—and presumably its mistress—with his thumb, “is to cut in when she’s ’arfway through what she’s got to say. Them kind o’ wimmen don’t mind bein’ interrupted. Leastways, they mind a bit, but they ain’t annoyed. They go on afterwards same as if you ’adn’t interrupted of ’em. You sees what I mean?”

“I see what you mean,” said Jim.

“My old woman goes on just like ’er”—with another thumb indication—“and so I know. I let ’er reel it off till I’m tired, and then I change the subjick, casual-like. It’s quiet easy to make ’em change the subjick. There’s wimmen ’oo, directly an idea enters their brains, utters it wiv their mouves. See? It goes inter one and outer the other as natural as rockin’ a baby. But you can always interrupt ’em wivout doin’ any ’arm, so you bear my tip in mind. Good-night to you, sir!” he added, mounting his box.

“Good-night to you, cabby,” said Jim, who concluded, as he walked up the steps, that the cabman was something of a philosopher.

He found the little servant endeavouring to raise one end of his portmanteau, which, being chock full of clothes, boots, books, and instruments, was no

light weight.

"Don't trouble," said Jim; "I'll carry it upstairs."

"I really cannot allow you to do that," said Mrs Maybury. "Frank," she added, turning to the boy, "help Mary with Dr Mortimer's portmanteau."

"Shan't!" said the boy, pouting.

"Obey me at once, Frank!"

"Shan't!" repeated the boy, disappearing into the room from which his step-mother had emerged.

By way of settling the matter, Jim shouldered the portmanteau. "Kindly go first," he said to Mary, "and show me where my room is."

As he was about to ascend the staircase, an immense black cat came stalking along the hall and rubbed itself, purring loudly, against his leg.

"What a wonder!" cried Mary. "Tom generally don't like strangers."

"Good old Tom!" said Jim. Then he commenced his ascent of the stairs, Mary preceding and "Tom" following him.

Thus guided—and accompanied—he at length reached his bedchamber—a by no means spacious apartment on the second floor.

"This was Dr Morgan's room, sir," said the servant; "it's to be yours now, sir."

"Thank you, Mary," said Jim.

Mary lingered. So did the cat.

"It's the room he slept in the night before he—he *died*, sir," she added, fearfully.

"Well," said Jim, with a smile, "I suppose he had to sleep somewhere!"

"Y—yes, sir—but don't you mind, sir?"

"*Mind!* No, of course not! You can run along now, if you like," he added, proceeding to unstrap his portmanteau.

As Jim, after unpacking the peculiar assortment of articles in his portmanteau, indulged in what barbers designate a "wash and brush up," his thoughts naturally turned to the people he was henceforth to live with. He wondered how many of them there were; whether there were any more boys like Master Frank; whether there were any more servants, and, if so, whether they were all as small as Mary; whether there were any more boarders, and, finally, whether this was really the home of the Dora Maybury he had met at the Milverton Street post-office. On this last point, however, he felt pretty certain. To begin with, Jim told himself, it was not probable that there were two pretty Dora Mayburys employed by the London Post Office; and, to end with, the boy Frank bore a most remarkable resemblance to the Dora Maybury Jim had been introduced to. In the dim light of the hall, indeed, the likeness was positively startling. Take that boy's Etons off and clothe him in a neat black dress, put a wig of woman's black hair

on him, and then, with the angularities of his figure shrouded by the gloom of the hall, there would be presented to view a very good double of Dora Maybury.

Taking these two arguments—if such they may be called—into consideration, Jim felt pretty sure that this was Dora's home. *Her* home! Jim's brain reeled for a moment at the mere idea of it. His coming here seemed to have happened as things happen in dreams—he could hardly realise even yet that he was actually under the same roof as that which afforded shelter to Dora Maybury.

So quickly had this change in his circumstances been brought about, that he had not even considered what Miss Maybury's ideas on the subject of his advent might be. In truth, he hardly dared to consider the position from that point of view.

Jim had accepted his present post in his usual happy-go-lucky way, being at an age when men of his temperament do not act with much forethought. Had Sir Savile asked him to accompany an expedition in search of the North Pole, he would have agreed to go without a moment's hesitation; had the great surgeon offered him a billet as medical officer to a tour of exploration in Equatorial Africa, Jim would have "signed on" with all the readiness in the world; and with an equal amount of promptitude he would have sailed as surgeon on an emigrant steamer, would have taken over the medical duties in a small-pox ship, a workhouse, a blind school, or a convict prison. Had some great air-vessel been invented, Jim would have jumped at the opportunity to accompany her in her ethereal journey as medical adviser to the intrepid voyagers; or, if such a post had been on offer, he would have consented to doctor the exiles in a Siberian mine. He was, in fact, ready to go anywhere so long as he went in a medical capacity.

Whatever Jim's faults were—and they were many in number—he was at least devoted to his profession. His heart was in his work, and when he really put his shoulder to the wheel there was more than a touch of genius in the manoeuvres of his "hand." For Jim was a surgeon before anything.

Here he was, however, in charge of an obscure practice, where, owing to the proximity of hospitals, there would be few calls on his surgical skill. He would always be welcome, of course, in the operating theatre at "Matt's," although it was not likely that he would often have time to attend there.

Did Jim regret accepting this humble billet in a humble district? Not for a moment! Indeed, when he thought how Fate had afforded him a chance of seeing Dora every day, he very nearly broke into a hornpipe on his bedroom hearthrug. However, he restrained himself, and went down to the drawing-room, the big black cat following steadily in his wake.

Mrs Maybury, her large body clothed in a silk dress that was well in keeping with the fallen fortunes of the family, introduced Jim, firstly, to her husband—a slender man of medium height, between fifty and sixty, with an exceedingly

well-cut face and neatly trimmed beard. He welcomed Jim to his house in a few well-chosen, courteous words, and Jim, as he noted the other's perfectly easy tone and manner, understood how Dora had come by the same distinguishing characteristics.

Jim was then introduced to the two other boarders—to Miss Bird, a maiden lady of obese person, harsh voice, and some sixty summers; and to Mr Cleave, a tall, spare man, with a severe face whose beauty was not enhanced by the pimples which flourished upon its surface. Mr Cleave appeared to be about thirty years of age.

"And now," said Mrs Maybury, as Jim took his seat on a small and uncompromisingly hard chair by her side, "I will tell you our ways and hours, Dr Mortimer. We breakfast at eight, as my husband and one of my daughters have to go to business early—" ("Aha!" thought Jim) "and Frank to school. Not that he does much good there," she continued, "as he is kept in almost every day for not learning his home lessons properly. He goes to the Metropolitan School for Boys—yes, a very good school, but the money seems to be wasted in Frank's case. Either he is teasing Mary or the cat, or getting into mischief of some sort—indeed," lowering her voice, "he has nearly driven Miss Bird out of the house already; not that that would be a very great loss, indeed, seeing that she—"

"By the way, Mrs Maybury," said Jim, recollecting the cabman's advice, "you will excuse my mentioning it, but have you a dau—"

At that moment, with a jingle, a rattle, and a stamping of hoofs, a cab pulled up in front of No. 9. Mrs Maybury hastened to the window and peered through the blind.

"It is Dora and Mr Jefferson—how kind of him to drive her home!"

Jim's tongue froze to his teeth. "Yes, I have two daughters—step-daughters, rather," she continued, returning to Jim's side, "the elder, Harriet Rebecca—she hates her names so much that we call her 'H.R.'—helps me with the housekeeping, and Dora is in—in the—er—Civil Service. Mr Jefferson," she added, confidentially, "has been paying her attentions for some time."

At that moment the door opened, and Dora Maybury, radiant with excitement, hastened up to her stepmother. "Oh, mamma, Mr Jefferson has a box at Daly's to-night. Can I go with him? He says he doesn't mind Frank coming, too—"

"Certainly you may go, dear. Oh, and one moment, dear! Dr Mortimer—this is my step-daughter—Dora."

"I have had the pleasure," said Jim, as he bent his lofty head, "of meeting Miss Dora before, Mrs Maybury."

"Indeed!" cried Mrs Maybury. "How very small the world is! Yes—and—Mr Jefferson—Dr Mortimer."

Dora's companion had entered the room and approached the group. Directly their eyes met, Mr Jefferson and Jim recognised each other, the former being no less a person than the pale-faced gentleman who had uttered loud remarks at the Exhibition concerning early closing.

"I too have had the pleasure of meeting Dr Mortimer before," said Mr Jefferson, without troubling to return Jim's bow, "but I cannot say that I am pleased to see him again."

"Why, dear me!" said Jim with ready wit, "you must be the man who trod on my toes at the Exhibition the other night."

And at this unexpected rejoinder—much to Mr Jefferson's annoyance—Dora's pretty lips parted in an unmistakable smile.

CHAPTER IX. IN THE PILLORY.

The somewhat strained situation brought about by Mr Jefferson's remark was suddenly relieved by a loud scream, and then a volume of shrill protest from Mary, who appeared, judging by the sound of her voice, to be in close proximity to the drawing-room door.

"Shut *hup*, Master Frank—give *hover*, I say. Your pa shall 'ear of this—"

Master Frank jeered rudely. "Bah, tell-! Don't care if he does!"

"Oh!" shrieked Mary, "it's bitin' me. Take it off, Master Frank!"

Mr Maybury walked to the door and, opening it, looked into the hall.

"What is the matter, Mary—why are you making so much noise?" he inquired.

"Master Frank put a beetle on my neck," whimpered Mary.

"Didn't," said Frank.

"Don't tell an untruth, Frank," his father warned him. "Did you or did you not put a beetle on Mary's neck?"

"It was a spider," admitted Frank, who, tease and scapegrace as he was, had not yet developed into that most difficult of persons to deal with—a liar.

"It was something crawly, and I thought it was a beetle," said Mary; "he keeps beetles," she added, in a tone conveying painfully correct knowledge on the point.

"Apologise at once to Mary," Mr Maybury commanded his son.

"Don't see why I should," muttered the rebellious youth.

"Very well, then—you will not go to the theatre to-night with Mr Jefferson and Dora."

The younger Miss Maybury, blushing somewhat (Jim noted the fact with a sinking heart), hastened to the scene of reprimand. "Oh, Frank—say you are sorry. You *must* come to-night."

Mr Jefferson, with his eye on the old-fashioned chandelier, fervently hoped that Frank would remain obstinately unrepentant.

"I'm—er—sorry," said Frank, stiffly.

"*Dear* Frank—I knew you would!" said Dora, flinging her arms round her brother's neck and bestowing a kiss of gratitude upon his brow.

"Here—chuck that!" cried Frank, shaking himself free. "What time must I be ready by?" he added.

"We shall start directly after dinner—I'm going up to dress now," cried Dora, and so the group separated, Frank and his sister proceeding upstairs, Mary descending to the kitchen—where Miss H. R. Maybury was preparing the evening meal—and Mr Maybury returning to the drawing-room.

"That boy," exclaimed Miss Bird, in a loud, nutmeg-grating tone, "ought to be sent to a reformatory."

Mrs Maybury turned on her lady boarder with asperity.

"You will oblige me, Miss Bird, by moderating your language when speaking of Frank."

"Idle, graceless young rascal!" added Miss Bird, who was not at all afraid of Mrs Maybury.

"Of course," said Mrs Maybury, with a contemptuous glance at her husband, "if the boy's father allows him to be spoken of in this way, I, who am only his stepmother—"

"Miss Bird is a little severe in her strictures, but I am afraid something must shortly be done to curb Frank's insubordination," said Mr Maybury with admirable tact.

"Try him with a whipping and dry bread and water for a week," snarled Miss Bird, who disliked children generally, and abominated Master Maybury.

"Pardon?" inquired Mr Cleave, who had sat through all the clamour deep in a bilious-looking periodical called *The Total Abstainer*. Mr Cleave, it should be added, was a little deaf. As, on looking up, he found Miss Bird scowling at him, he concluded that she had addressed him.

"—Bread and water for a week!" shouted Miss Bird, irritably. She hated having to repeat anything, and the case was made worse in Mr Cleave's case by the defect in his hearing.

"Water?" Mr Cleave nodded and smiled. "Certainly—plenty of water. Are

you an abstainer, sir?" he concluded, turning to Jim, whose name he had not properly caught when they were introduced.

"Not I," replied Jim heartily.

Mr Cleave blinked severely.

"You sometimes fall into deadly sin by polluting your lips with alcoholic liquor?" he inquired.

"I occasionally have a drink," acknowledged Jim.

Gradually a very pained and shocked expression stole over Mr Cleave's cadaverous countenance. For Mr Cleave, as need hardly be explained, was a fanatic on the liquor question—the kind of ill-balanced enthusiast that does his cause more harm than good by his unbridled and immoderate denunciations of the evil he wishes to abolish. He gazed upon Jim with wonder and shame, and then, deeming him too hardened to be affected by remonstrance, turned for comfort to the pages of *The Total Abstainer*, and particularly to that part where notorious cases of drunkenness were set down under the kind, Christian-like heading of "OUR PILLORY."

While these remarks were being passed, Mr Jefferson, who had dressed for the theatre before he went to meet Dora, had been turning over the pages of a magazine and occasionally stealing a glance at Jim. For he was rather puzzled at finding the latter at No. 9. He was—it must be remembered—entirely ignorant concerning Jim's identity. He had seen Jim before, it was true, when visiting the Exhibition with Dora and her sister, and had looked diligently in the paper for several days afterwards to see what sort of punishment had been meted out to the turbulent youth, but had failed to glean any information there, thanks to the absolute silence Koko's press friends had maintained on the subject.

So, gradually, the incident faded out of Mr Jefferson's mind, and he had forgotten all about it when he entered Mr Maybury's house on this particular evening, to find himself face to face with the disturber of the peace whose toes he had trodden on some ten days since—and whose pardon he had so unwisely omitted to beg.

Jefferson was the son of a wealthy City man. He enjoyed a liberal allowance, golfed, motored, and ploughed the smooth waters of the Thames in a steam-launch. He did everything, in fact, which cost money. Golf is not a cheap game as played in clubs round London; motoring is not a poor man's hobby; a steam-launch is a fairly expensive toy. Football and cricket are trifles light as air—from an expenditure point of view—compared with the pastimes Mr Jefferson followed. Mr Jefferson might have played football and cricket, for he was only twenty-six, but he preferred pursuits which betokened him to be the possessor of a well-filled purse. When he referred to his recreations he endeavoured to make it clear to his listeners that he had been out in his own motor-car, and

that he had not been churning the pleasant reaches of Henley and Maidenhead at the invitation of any whisky baronet or tea and coffee knight. He had been, if you please, in his own launch. An unkind City acquaintance of his had once wondered—audibly—why Jefferson didn't have the receipted bill for his launch pasted on the exterior of the craft, just under her name. This was unkind, but they say very unkind things about and to each other in the City. The Stock Exchange—of which the Messrs Jefferson, father and son, were both members—is as merciless in its chaff as a public school. Which, as my public school readers will agree, is speaking very highly of the Stock Exchange.

For the rest, Mr Jefferson could make himself exceedingly agreeable when he liked, and as he was good-looking, attentive, gentlemanly, and always well dressed, it was not surprising that he had managed to make an impression on Dora's girlish and inexperienced mind. To tell the truth, Mr Jefferson had come to the conclusion that Dora would be his for the asking, and, therefore, was not going to hurry himself over the matter. She was a charming girl—the most charming girl he had ever met—and he admired her immensely. Possibly he would have been deeply in love with her by this time had she not always received him with a smile of genuine welcome and accepted his invitations to go here and there, and see this and that, with unconcealed delight. After the drudgery of the post-office counter, and the doubtful joys offered by her home circle, Mr Jefferson's society came as a very pleasant relief to Dora. Whenever they went out together he spent his money handsomely and gave her of the best—and Dora was accordingly grateful and quite prepared to whisper a tender affirmative when Harold Jefferson asked her to be his wife.

So stood the matter when Jefferson drove her home—she had begged off from her work early, at his request—this September evening. So stood the matter when Dora entered the drawing-room and was introduced to "Dr Mortimer."

When Harold Jefferson, following Dora at a leisurely pace, heard Jim say that he had met Miss Maybury before, he pricked up his ears. And when, on entering the drawing-room, he saw who the gentleman was that had met Dora before, a vague but distinct feeling of annoyance came over him. He had met Jim in the inimical manner already described, and, as he turned over the pages of the magazine, made up his mind to take an early opportunity to inform Mrs Maybury of the part this new boarder—Jefferson presumed Jim was a new boarder—had lately played before a large and interested audience.

Presently Dora and Frank came downstairs. The former looked prettier than ever in a white dress—with a pearl necklace, a gift of Mr Jefferson's, round her fair neck, and some other tiny shining ornament in her hair. Frank looked unusually clean and dapper in his best suit, Dora having tied a neat bow for him and generally supervised his toilet.

Dora seated herself on the arm of her father's chair, and stroked the thin hair on his head in the caressing way both pretty and plain daughters are often pleased to exhibit. Once only Dora stole a shy and somewhat apprehensive glance at Jim. She had recognised Jim's voice directly he spoke to Mr Jefferson at the Exhibition, and had turned her face away, as she did not desire Jim, on the strength of his introduction to her earlier in the day, to address her whilst he was in such a quarrelsome mood.

And now—here he was—this Mr (or Dr) Mortimer—under her own father's roof; and here, too, was Mr Jefferson, who had already expressed his feelings with regard to this Mr (or Dr) Mortimer. Under the peculiar circumstances, Dora had no desire to enter into conversation with Jim, and so took shelter—as girls so often, and so wisely, do—under the paternal wing.

Frank, however, had no reason to avoid Mr Mortimer. He rather admired him for the easy way he had picked up his portmanteau and shouldered it upstairs. A real boy admires a strong man, and Frank was a real boy enough—suffering, at present, from being too much at home—for his summer holidays were only just over. So he seated himself by Jim.

"I say, Dr Mortimer," he said at length, "would you mind telling me how tall you are?"

Jim was genially glad of somebody to talk to.

"Six foot four," he replied.

"I say! Do you like being so tall?"

"Don't mind it," said Jim; "knock my head rather too often, perhaps."

Frank laughed. "There's a master at my school almost as tall as you," he proceeded, "but much broader."

"Indeed!" said Jim, who frequently had to listen to comparisons of this sort.

"Well," continued Frank, surveying Jim with a critical eye, "I don't know whether he's *much* broader. You are *rather* broad, aren't you? But he's much fatter. They say he weighs eighteen stone. What do *you* weigh?"

"Frank," said Mrs Maybury, "don't ask such personal questions, dear."

Dora smiled. She was listening in a not uninterested way to her brother's ingenuous remarks.

"Oh, I don't mind, Mrs Maybury," said Jim; "I go just over thirteen stone," he added, addressing Frank.

The boy looked thoughtful. Presently he said: "Can you fight well, Dr Mortimer?"

He asked the question in all innocence, for Dora had not breathed a word about Jim's performance at the Exhibition.

"I don't like fighting," replied Jim; "I am afraid of my nose bleeding."

Frank gazed at him with suspicion. Then, as Jim's face remained quite

grave, Frank's grew scornful. Afraid of his nose bleeding! That was a nice thing for a man of six feet four to say!

To what extent Frank might have continued his interrogations we can only vaguely surmise, but at this point Miss Bird—who had been much irritated by Frank's inquisitive treble tones—dashed into the breach.

"And what, Mr Cleave," she asked, "are the cases in your 'Pillory' this week? Anything of an exceptional nature?"

Mr Cleave came to life with a convulsive start. He had been absorbed in a series of reports supplied by the *Abstainer's* special commissioner from the London police-courts.

"Pardon?" he asked. "Didn't catch—"

Miss Bird snapped her teeth, which came together much as a man-trap would close on an unfortunate poacher's leg.

"'Pillory!' What's the worst case?" she bawled.

"Oh! The cases in 'Our Pillory'?" bleated Mr Cleave.

"Yes! Read 'em out!" Miss Bird returned in a saw-like, rasping growl.

Mr Cleave turned over the pages of *The Total Abstainer* with evident relish.

"The worst," he said, in a high, thin voice, "is one that our commissioner only heard by unexpected good fortune. He does not often go westwards. He finds that Bow Street and Whitechapel bring more grist—"

"Read it out!" shouted Miss Bird.

"A piteous example of what over-indulgence in alcohol may bring a man to (read Mr Cleave) was afforded by a case which came before our notice one day last week in the Kensington Police Court. The degraded being, who faced the magistrate with an unabashed gaze, was a young doctor named Mortimer, who gave as his address a place of mercy and healing—the Hospital of St Matthew."

"By George!" exclaimed Jim, "that's how our local rag got hold of it! Copied it out of your paper."

"Pardon?" observed Mr Cleave.

"Go on!" roared Miss Bird.

"The facts were few but terrible (continued Mr Cleave). This member of a noble calling, inflamed and rendered reckless of all consequences by the Bend aforesaid, actually made a ferocious onslaught on a band of six policemen. In a fair pleasure garden he let loose his unruly passions, and only after a terrific struggle was he captured, handcuffed, and thrust into a cell—"

"They locked you up, then?" inquired Jefferson, glancing maliciously at Jim.

"Not they," said Jim; "I was let out on bail."

Miss Bird turned sharply round and glared into Jim's face.

"Are *you* the person referred to in that report?" she demanded.

"I am," said Jim.

A silence fell on the room. Even the dim-of-hearing Mr Cleave appreciated the situation, and understood that the lately arrived Dr Mortimer was identical with the prime villain of the "Pillory" that week.

"Pray continue, Mr Cleave," said Jefferson at length, with a curl of his lip; "I am sure Dr Mortimer does not mind."

Mr Cleave was bending over the paper again, when an interruption came from an unthought-of quarter. Mr Maybury rose to his feet.

"I do not think," he said, "that Mr Cleave had better proceed with his reading."

"Nonsense!" said Jefferson. "Go ahead, Mr Cleave."

"For the sake of the Cause, Mr Maybury," piped Cleave, "I wish to--"

"I am master of this house," said the ruined manufacturer, who, generally so mild and retiring, now spoke with unfaltering firmness, "and I say that no man shall be insulted to his face under my roof. You will oblige me, Mr Cleave, by not reading another word of that report. Frank, go and see if dinner is ready."

CHAPTER X. AT THE SURGERY.

Jim set out for the surgery next morning feeling somewhat depressed. His sins were coming home to him. The attitude adopted towards him generally by No. 9 was a hostile one. After the sad disclosures on the previous evening, Miss Bird and Mr Cleave had, metaphorically, turned their backs on him; Mrs Maybury was coldly polite; Miss H. R. Maybury (a thin, angular young lady) barely recognised his presence; and, on the whole, Jim would have spent a most chilly evening had not Mr Maybury invited him to play chess.

"Seems to me," said Jim, as he left Derby Crescent, "I'm not in good odour there. Shall I leave or shall I live it down? I should like to leave, but—*hullo!*"

This exclamation was caused by the hitherto unnoticed presence of Tom, the great black cat, who had quietly followed Jim out of the Crescent into the main

road, and seemed bent on accompanying the young doctor to his destination. Jim endeavoured to make the cat go back, but Tom persisted in accompanying him, and so at length the two reached Mount Street, where Dr Taplow's surgery was situated.

On the pavement by the surgery door a group of meanly clad people were already waiting for "the Doctor." The women—they were all women or children—gazed with interest on the Long 'Un. He was a man most people looked at twice, and to these poor souls he was of peculiar interest, for he was to minister to their ills. And who—in times of sickness—is of greater interest to one than the man who possesses the skill to make one well again?

"Waiting to see me?" said Jim, cheerily, "All right—you may come in in a moment."

Scouring the passage that lay on the other side of the door was a hag of forbidding appearance.

"I am Mr Mortimer," said Jim, in reply to her stare of inquiry. "I have come to take charge of the practice."

Passing by her, he opened a door on the right and entered the waiting-room—a bare apartment furnished with a few chairs and a table, on which latter lay a scanty collection of well-thumbed periodicals. Opening out of this was the surgery, which had not been entered, save by the hag aforesaid, since Dr Morgan had come by his untimely end.

On the desk lay the open ledger—with its quaint Latin entries—exactly as poor old Morgan had left it. On the shelves were the usual ranks of bottles containing acids, poisons, and other drugs; and here and there on the counter under the shelves stood various dose-glasses, phials, a stethoscope, and a pair of forceps, in whose grim clutch a rotten double tooth that had been wrenched from some unfortunate aching jaw still remained. The place was dirty and untidy, and altogether the sight that met Jim's eyes was most dispiriting. This was, indeed, a humble surgery in a humble district!

Still, Jim did not lose heart. He was fresh from one of the first hospitals in London—in spite of the sudden change in his fortunes he was full of enthusiasm, and eager to apply his knowledge.

The patients filed in, and Jim saw each in turn. They were all suffering from common ailments, and the Long 'Un—after his varied experience among the out-patients at Matt's, where he had sometimes doctored a hundred persons in one morning—made short work of them.

One little girl had a rash on her chest and back. Jim readily diagnosed the complaint as chicken-pox.

"Take her home and keep her in bed for a week, mum!" said he, to the girl's mother; "keep her warm, mind. If she gets a chill, it will drive the spots in, and

the child may be very ill then. Keep her warm. Medicine? No, she doesn't want medicine. Just keep her warm—and away from the other children. All live in one room? Well, they'll all have it—if they've not had it before. Just as well. Sixpence, please!"

A young seamstress had no appetite and felt too weak to work. No, she wasn't married—she helped her mother. Take anything to drink? Only tea. How often? Oh, the pot was on the hob all day. They just helped themselves when they wanted it.

"The matter with you, mum," said Jim, "is *tea!* You're poisoning yourself. So comforting? Yes, but it's poison. No more tea, mum! Medicine? Yes. I'll make you up a nice tonic. And go out for a walk every evening—don't tire yourself, though!"

But it wasn't all sixpenny and shilling counter-trade. Later in the day—when it had been noised about that a new doctor had come to take charge of the practice—various messages—some verbal, some scribbled on notepaper—arrived. Would the doctor come to see Mrs Smith, who was suffering from heart complaint; and Mrs Jones, who had nothing at all the matter with her, but always thought she had? So Jim sallied forth and paid calls on the wives of fishmongers and ironmongers, and greengrocers, and publicans—nearly all his patients were women—ascended rickety staircases, dived into evil-smelling bedrooms, and went hither and thither and about and around on his useful errands of healing and comfort.

Over the way, just opposite, was a provision shop and eating-house, bearing the name of "Harris & Son."

From the portals of this establishment, about two o'clock in the afternoon, issued a weary little old man of Jewish appearance, who, after glancing up and down Mount Street, crossed over to the surgery.

He found Jim doing up some medicine.

"How d'ye do, doctor?" said he.

"How are you, sir?"

"Queer, doctor. Thought I'd come and ask your advice."

"Go ahead," said Jim, jabbing a stick of sealing-wax into the gas-jet.

"I've a funny feeling all over my 'ead—not in the 'ead, but all over it. I've been a good deal worried of late, doctor."

"Sort of feeling as if your hair was being brushed?" inquired Jim.

"That's it. Not so nice, though."

"I know it," said Jim; "I've had it myself when I've been stewing hard for an exam." (He hadn't really, but "having had it himself" was a medical formula that he deemed it well to abide by—it comforted patients.)

"Vell, I never! Vot is it, doctor?"

"Irritation of the subcutaneous nerves," said Jim, wisely.

"Ah!" said the weary little old man, "sounds bad!"

"Oh no—it'll soon go off. I'll make you up a tonic with a touch of bromide in it. That'll soothe you."

"*Bromide!* Vy, ain't that the vicked stuff society ladies take?"

"Some of them. But they take it neat—yours will be diluted."

Jim made up a bottle of "the mixture," and the old man laid down his shilling.

"I feel better already, sir," he said; "'ope you'll come over to our place and get a bit to eat when you vant it. I'm from over the road—Harris."

"Right!" said Jim, "I won't forget. Good-day, Mr Harris."

And in this way an adventure befell Jim, for, feeling hungry about an hour later, he went over to the emporium of Harris & Son. Blocking up the doorway he found a burly ruffian with close-cropped hair and a scarf round his neck.

"Now, my man!" said Jim, wishing to pass by.

The gentleman addressed turned on him with an oath.

"Oo are you 'my manning,' young lamp-post? *You* get out of *my* way—d'ye 'ear?"

Now Jim conjectured—and rightly—that the ruffian in question was of the Hooligan order, or belonged to a class of society near akin to that order. So, being aware that he had to hold his own in this district, and that it would never do to be intimidated, and bearing in mind that in situations of this kind it was a good plan to hit first and hit hard, he let drive between the fellow's eyes and knocked him clean off his feet.

This done, he stepped over him and proceeded to the counter to order some food.

As the rascal dropped, a pale slip of a girl, who was holding a baby, started up from the table at which she was sitting and rushed towards the prostrate figure.

The man Jim had felled struggled to his feet with a flood of imprecations pouring from his lips. The blow had dazed him, and for a few moments he glared about him in an uncertain way. Then, as his senses cleared, he perceived Jim, and gave a hoarse cry, fumbling the while at the heavily buckled belt which he wore round his waist.

"Oh, Jack—don't!" cried the girl, interposing her slender form between the man and the object of his meditated vengeance. As she did so, Jim noticed that one of her eyes was discoloured; it was not hard to guess who had caused the injury.

"Get over the counter!" cried Mr Harris; "you'll be safer 'ere."

"Not I," said Jim; "I can look after myself."

"'E's a terror," said the old man, in a hasty undertone; "'e's a Hooligan—the worst of 'em—their boss."

"I don't care," said Jim; "I can tackle him."

At length the Hooligan managed to unclasp his belt, but even as he did so two policemen entered the shop.

"Now then—get out of this—quick!"

They knew him—evidently. They were two to his one. And there was Mortimer near at hand to help if required.

The Hooligan was not without some regard for his personal well-being. Directing a scowl of hate at Jim, he put on his belt again and left the shop, followed by the girl.

"Same old game?" said one of the constables to Mr Harris.

"I didn't see it all—but I believe this gentleman knocked 'im down," replied Mr Harris. "'E's the noo doctor over the road."

The policeman eyed Jim with interest.

"I'd advise you to be careful, sir," he said; "that's the most dangerous man in these parts. He's just done six months, and only came out three days ago. We've been keeping an eye on him."

"I'll look out—never fear," said Jim.

For some hours after that Jim was very busy, but even in the midst of his work he seemed to see the white, pleading face of the Hooligan's girl-wife. No doubt she loved the brute—no doubt she had been endeavouring to keep him in a good temper ever since he had come out of prison. And the man, smarting from his recent confinement, sulky, and conscious of his bull-like strength, had probably been thirsting for a quarrel all these three days.

Then Jim's sharp speech fell on his ear, and the Hooligan wasn't accustomed to being spoken to sharply by anybody save a policeman. He had wheeled round fiercely, and had hardly had time to take stock of the person addressing him before he was floored. He had never received such quick treatment before in his life.

"Still," thought Jim, "I wouldn't have hit him had I known his wife was there. At any rate, I'd have let him hit me first."

Jim got some tea at a shop in Blackfriars Road, and was fully employed making up medicine at the surgery until it was dusk, and the street lamps were shining yellow. Then he bethought him of Derby Crescent and dinner.

He was tidying up the surgery preparatory to taking his leave of the place for the day, when there came a short, peremptory knock on the street door, which he had previously closed. Jim heard a murmur of voices without. A woman, it seemed, was remonstrating with a man.

Jim went to the door and opened it. There, awaiting him, was the Hooligan;

a little farther off stood the latter's slip of a wife.

"Well?" said Jim, curtly.

Even as he spoke the girl gave the alarm: "Look out, sir—he's got his belt off!" But the Hooligan was too quick, and the heavy buckle of the belt came crash on to Jim's head, just above the brow, ere the woman's warning was finished.

It was a frightful blow, and extracted a cry of pain from Jim. One cry, and then Jim sprang forward, dodged the belt swinging at his head again, and closed with the Hooligan. The two forms fell with a crash—Jim on top. In a second he was kneeling on the ruffian, his hands upon the other's throat.

"Oh, sir—oh, sir!—don't give him in charge! Oh, sir—he shan't do it again!—please don't give him in charge!"

It was a piteous appeal, and Jim, hearing, rose to his feet.

"All right—take him away!"

Jim's head was swimming, and the blood was trickling over his face.

He staggered back into the passage, feeling that his senses were leaving him. Supporting himself by the wall, he passed through the waiting-room, gained the surgery proper, and was clutching at the counter when a figure appeared in the doorway.

It was the Hooligan—with an uglier look than ever in his eyes.

Jim saw the brutal face and the uplifted belt. The man was going to hit him again. The belt rose—but of a sudden help arrived from an unexpected quarter, for at that moment a little, quick-moving man entered the surgery, and, noting the position of affairs, seized the Hooligan's wrists, and brought the ruffian to the floor with a neat trip.

"I got your card, and came along as soon as I could," said Koko. "By the way, who's your friend?"

"Oh, he was only getting even with me," said Jim. "I hit him earlier in the day."

The Hooligan's wife was endeavouring to make her husband leave the waiting-room, but he seemed anxious to renew the combat.

Her

expostulations ceased abruptly, however—as did the man's maledictions—and a new voice fell upon the hearing of the two friends.

"Now, my good people, do you want anything here? If you will wait a few moments you shall be attended to."

Then Jim and Koko saw the doorway of the surgery proper filled by a portly form.

"You are Mr Mortimer, I believe?" said the new arrival. "I am Dr Taplow. I am greatly obliged to my friend Sir Savile for obtaining your services for me, and must thank you for acting as my *locum tenens* to-day. I am accompanied,

however, by the gentleman I myself have appointed to take charge of the practice, and so I shall not require you after to-day."

Jim bowed. "Very good, sir," he replied.

"By the way—are you hurt?" inquired Dr Taplow.

"It's only a scratch," said Jim, reaching down his hat.

"Indeed! I was afraid it was something worse ... er—if you will let me know what I owe you, I will send you a cheque ... er ... come in, Dr Perkins, come in ... er—*good evening*, Mr Mortimer!"

CHAPTER XI. MR MAYBURY'S RESOLVE.

Mr Maybury received a long and severe curtain lecture from his wife on the night of Jim's arrival at No. 9, the subject of it being Jim Mortimer and Jim Mortimer's delinquencies.

"After the disgraceful revelations of this evening," said the good dame, as, having blown out the candle, her lord composed himself for slumber, "we can't allow him to stay with us. It would give the house a bad name. People would tattle and gossip until we should be obliged to move. Imagine! Drunk and disorderly! fought the policemen! had to be bound with ropes and taken in an ambulance to a police-station—"

"I hardly think it was quite so bad as that," Mr Maybury interrupted in a mild, sleepy voice.

"The fact remains," continued Mrs Maybury, with energy, "that he was taken to a police-station, was fined, was reprimanded by the magistrate. A nice sort of man to have in one's house contaminating the children! Frank has taken a fancy to him already; the next thing will be *Frank* fighting policemen—"

"Don't talk such nonsense, my dear," said Mr Maybury. "Medical students," he added, "often get into trouble. Nobody cares much if they do; they are regarded as privileged madcaps. Dr Mortimer is a very young man—still a student at heart. I must say I like what I've seen of him very much, and am not surprised at Frank's taking a fancy to him."

"Do you want your son to be sent to a reformatory, as Miss Bird suggested?" inquired Mrs Maybury.

"He won't be," her spouse assured her; "Frank has no vices; he's only mis-

chievous.”

”If he imitates Dr Mortimer,” cried Mrs Maybury, ”there’s no knowing what the boy won’t come to. No, William, you must tell Dr Mortimer that he must find fresh lodgings. He can’t stay here. Miss Bird and Mr Cleave will both leave if he does. Mr Cleave told me to-night that he cannot breathe the same air as such a man.”

”Cleave’s an old woman,” muttered Mr Maybury.

”Miss Bird—” began Mrs Maybury.

”I wish Miss Bird *would* go,” put in Mr Maybury.

”And you can see Mr Jefferson doesn’t like him,” continued Mrs Maybury, ”with half an eye. Mr Jefferson!—the man to whom you are indebted for your daily bread!”

”I’m employed by his father,” objected Mr Maybury.

”It’s all the same. Mr Jefferson got you your post. Suppose he told his father that you were harbouring a man who fights policemen and gets drunk—”

”His father would say that that was my business,” rejoined Mr Maybury.

”Well, we can’t risk keeping him here. It’s too dangerous. I’ve no objection to the young man myself—”

”Then why d’you go on about him so much?” retorted Mr Maybury.

”For the sake of our home and its reputation,” almost shrieked Mrs Maybury, ”that’s why. Here I work and slave and get no thanks—not a word of thanks—and then, when I express an opinion, you snap my head off. It’s more than flesh and blood can stand!” she concluded, dissolving into tears.

”Suppose,” said Mr Maybury, placidly, ”we discuss the matter in the morning?”

”I won’t say another word,” cried Mrs Maybury, between her sobs; ”I’ve said all I have to say. If you keep this man here, he’ll take our good name away. There—now I’ve done!”

And so, with sobs at intervals, she at length fell asleep.

The once wealthy merchant held a very modest position in the business house of Jefferson & Son. He was, in fact, but one of their book-keepers. He—the erstwhile employer of fifty clerks and five hundred workpeople—now sat on a high stool at a high desk and laboured at the books for a small salary. When a man has come down in the world with a sudden run he is generally to be had at a low figure, and Jefferson & Son bore the fact in mind when they engaged Mr Maybury. The hours (ten to four) were short, it is true, but Mr Maybury would have worked later willingly could he have thereby added to his earnings.

The other clerks at Jefferson & Son’s were mainly young fellows between whom and Mr Maybury no great bond of fellowship could very well exist. He was left largely to himself, therefore, went out to his frugal mid-day meal alone,

returned alone, and said very little to those about him from the time the office opened till its closing hour.

Harold Jefferson did not trouble himself with business more than he could help. He preferred the West End to the City. However, he put in a certain number of appearances per week, and whilst at the office treated Mr Maybury with respect, mingled with a slight but distinct air of patronage.

Such conversations as they held related, of course, entirely to the firm's business, and so it was with no little surprise that, on the day following Jim's arrival at No. 9, Mr Maybury received an invitation from Harold Jefferson. "I want to speak to you about one or two matters," ran the pencilled note which the office-boy handed to Dora's father, "so shall be glad if you will lunch with me at 1.30. I will be waiting for you at the front entrance at that hour."

It was, of course, as much a command as an invitation. At the appointed time Mr Maybury met young Mr Jefferson, who at once hailed a cab and drove his guest to a restaurant in the West End. It would not do at all (thought young Mr Jefferson) to be seen lunching with one of his clerks at a restaurant in the City.

"Now, Mr Maybury," said the host, when lunch was over and they had lit their cigars, "I have two things to say to you. One of them concerns your daughter—Miss Dora."

Mr Maybury inclined his head. He had not imagined that this invitation was the outcome of purely hospitable motives.

"I have been paying her attentions for some time," said the well-to-do young stockbroker, "and I propose, with your sanction, to ask her to marry me."

"You have my full consent to do so," said the ruined merchant, graciously.

"From what you have observed, do you think that my proposal will be favourably received?" asked Jefferson, carelessly.

"I can offer no opinion," said Mr Maybury.

"I may at least take it that, if she accepts me, you are willing to regard me as a prospective son-in-law?"

"Perfectly willing," was the reply.

"Thank you. Now, as to this fellow Mortimer—"

"I beg your pardon. What has Mr Mortimer to do with the matter?"

"If," said Jefferson, "I become engaged to your daughter, Mr Maybury, I shall have a decided objection to your allowing such a man as Mortimer to remain under the same roof as my *fiancée*."

Mr Maybury took a thoughtful pull at his cigar. The well-to-do young stockbroker looked keenly at the ruined merchant. It was to the latter's advantage to defer to the former. Was he not, as his wife remarked, indebted to this man for his daily bread?

Mr Maybury laid down his cigar and sipped his champagne, and meantime such reflections as these coursed through his brain. He was a very poor man, 'tis true, but he had always prided himself on being a just one. Personally, he had perceived no great harm in "this fellow Mortimer." Why, therefore, should he turn him out of his house?

"Well?" inquired the young stockbroker, curtly.

"The most charitable course to pursue," said Mr Maybury, at length, "would be to see how he goes on. Should he prove himself unfit—"

"He has. He is a low, drunken brawler. I cannot bear the thought of Dora being brought into daily contact with him. You will at least admit that I have a right to lodge an objection against him—or will have, should your daughter accept me?"

"I should prefer to see how he goes on," said Mr Maybury.

"Very well, sir," rejoined Jefferson, rising from his seat with a look of great annoyance on his face, "have it your own way. Waiter, my bill. Please excuse me now, Mr Maybury, as I am not returning to the City."

Instead of going straight to the office, when he got back to the City, Mr Maybury turned into a quaint little churchyard—a smoke-begrimed patch of green, where one might rest awhile on a seat. Here he remained for ten minutes, and when he at length turned his steps officewards, he had made up his mind that, however disastrous such an attitude might prove to his prospects, he would in no way seek to influence Dora in Harold Jefferson's favour. Nor should Jim Mortimer leave his house, unless he himself desired to go.

"I have lost pretty nearly everything," thought the ex-merchant as he paced his way along the crowded pavement, "but till the day of my death I hope, please God, to retain my self-respect."

The thought inspired him, and he went back to his book-keeping with an unusual light in his eyes—with an additional firmness in his step. 'Twas true that Fate had robbed him of wealth and position, but Fate's worst buffets could not cause him to act in any way save that becoming a gentleman.

CHAPTER XII.

KOKO'S WORD.

"We'd better have a cab," said Koko, in his quiet way, as, after Jim's curt dismissal

by Dr Taplow, they walked down the pavement together.

"Right you are," groaned Jim. He felt too ill, weak, and miserable to do anything except just agree with everything that was said to him. If the gentle reader has ever been sea-sick he will be in a position to appreciate Jim's condition.

"Keep a grip on that lamp-post while I fetch one," said Koko, hastening away through the gloom of the autumn evening.

When the cab arrived, Jim got in thankfully; and the two friends, holding Tom, who had followed Jim out of the surgery, between them, rattled off.

"I suppose you'll ask me to stay to dinner with you?" said Koko.

Jim uttered a hollow laugh.

"Stay if you like, but I won't guarantee you'll enjoy yourself."

"Any girls?" inquired Koko, flirtingly.

"Two," said Jim; "also a woman-man teetotal crank, and a female gorilla."

Koko particularly wished to stay to dinner with Jim, for he was formulating a plan for Jim's future. But he was not going to expound it until Jim was in a state to give it due consideration.

On reaching No. 9 they found Frank lurking in the passage. When Jim removed his hat, Frank, observing his wound, was filled with curiosity.

"I say, Dr Mortimer, how did you hurt your forehead?"

"Somebody hurt it for me," said Jim.

"Was it a fight?" inquired the youth excitedly.

"Kind of one," admitted Jim.

Full of the news he had gleaned, Frank burst into the drawing-room, where Mr and Mrs Maybury, Dora, and the other paying guests were awaiting the summons to dinner.

"I say, pater, Dr Mortimer's been having a fight. He's got an awful cut over the napper."

"Frank!" exclaimed Mrs Maybury, "how often must I tell you not to use such vulgar terms?"

Frank grinned.

"You go and have a look at it!" he added, with supreme gusto, "you never saw such a whopping cut in all your life."

Mrs Maybury turned a glance on her husband which plainly said: "And what do you think of him now?"

Miss Bird gave a snort of disgust, and Mr Cleave, heaving a deep sigh, buried himself anew in the advertisements of *The Total Abstainer*, he having by this time utterly exhausted all the literary portions of the paper.

Jim sent Mrs Maybury a message by Mary intimating that he had brought a friend, Mr Somers, home with him, and would be greatly obliged if she would permit the said Mr Somers to remain to dinner. Mrs Maybury graciously replying

that she would be "most happy," Koko and Jim (the latter with his head neatly plastered) in due course appeared in the drawing-room.

Much to Mrs Maybury's surprise, Koko, after exchanging bows with the lady of the house, walked straight across to Dora and shook hands with her.

"You know Mr Somers, then, Dora?" inquired Mrs Maybury, somewhat sharply.

"Yes, mamma," replied Dora; "he is a friend of Miss Cook's."

"Indeed!" said Mrs Maybury, to whom it seemed that Miss Cook had been introducing Dora to very undesirable people—for Dora had informed her that it was by Miss Cook's agency she had become acquainted with Jim.

Dora had now been in the post-office six months, and had behaved so far in an exemplary manner. Even the girl's stepmother, prone to find fault as she was on the slightest pretext, had not discovered anything to grumble at in Dora's conduct. But now—now affairs were assuming a different complexion. Dora had made masculine friends unbeknown to her mother. One of them was a dissipated young doctor, and the other—well, who and what was this other man—this Mr Somers?

"And do you, too, belong to the medical profession, Mr Somers?" inquired the dame.

"No, I am a journalist," replied Koko.

Miss Bird glanced up sharply; Mr Cleave also looked across at the visitor. Miss Bird had not been introduced to Mr Somers, but she did not allow little obstacles of that kind to stand in her way when she required information.

"And what is your particular department?" she abruptly demanded.

"I work for the sporting press—I am what is known as a sporting journalist," replied Koko.

The inquisitive expression on Miss Bird's face turned into a stony glare of disapproval.

"You go to horse-races?"

Koko did not like being cross-examined about his private affairs in this unblushing manner. So he determined to let this rude old lady know all about himself so as to save further questions.

"Yes, I attend horse-races and swimming-matches, and billiard-matches and prize-fights—"

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" roared Miss Bird. As for Mr Cleave, he uttered a thin, high cough. He had heard that the average journalist did his work with a bottle of brandy at his elbow—what then must a journalist be like who reported prize-fights and horse-races! What indeed!

With a sigh he sought distraction in the long list of "Homes for Inebriates" which appeared regularly in *The Total Abstainer*. This weekly journal was Mr

Cleave's invariable comforter when he felt distressed. Besides, it offered £100 insurance in the event of one of its regular subscribers being accidentally killed. Several of Mr Cleave's nearest relatives took in the paper, and Mr Cleave had often calculated what amount he would receive as insurance should all these relatives be killed in one railway accident.

"I believe," Miss Bird went on (as Koko made no rejoinder), "that drunkenness is a common vice among persons working for the press. Is that not so, Mr Cleave?"

"Pardon?" queried Cleave, putting his hand to his ear.

"Bless the man!" exclaimed Miss Bird, irritated beyond measure, "why doesn't he get an ear-trumpet! I was saying," she continued, in a boisterous key, "that most journalists were drunkards. Is that not so?"

Now, Mr Cleave recollected Mr Maybury's stern rebuke of the previous evening, so he deemed it as well to be cautious.

"Some journalists," he replied, nodding pleasantly at Miss Bird.

"Most!" insisted Miss Bird.

"I will not go so far as to say that--" quavered Mr Cleave.

"Then you are a coward!" snapped Miss Bird, in utter disgust. Mr Cleave had proved but a backboneless creature when she had relied on his support.

It is highly probable that Miss Bird would have proceeded to put further questions of a personal nature to Koko had not Mary popped her head into the room with "Dinner's quite ready, mum."

Miss Bird's face cleared. She could eat twice as much as anyone else in the house (not excepting Frank), and the announcement of dinner always put her in a good temper.

Whilst Koko and Jim had been upstairs, before entering the drawing-room, Jim had given his friend a brief sketch of the situation. For, it must be remembered, this was their first meeting since Koko had read old Dr Mortimer's drastic and final epistle. When Jim told Koko that this house was the home of Miss Dora Maybury, Koko had smacked his chum on the back and enjoined him to go in and win; but when Jim mentioned Jefferson, and the latter's attitude with regard to Dora, Koko whistled thoughtfully.

Two things he decided. Firstly, that Jim must stay on at No. 9 at all hazards; and, secondly, that the plan which had been in course of formation in his mind from the moment Dr Taplow had told Jim to go, must take an immediate and definite shape.

That plan Koko intended to broach to Jim after dinner. But Fate willed otherwise.

The meal progressed quietly, the presence of a stranger possibly having a restraining influence on the shrewish outbursts of Miss H. R. Maybury, the

cheeky utterances of Master Frank, and the voluble rebukes of Mrs Maybury. Jim was seated between Miss Bird and Mr Cleave, the two girls, with Frank and Koko, facing him. Dora, as a matter of fact, sat immediately opposite Jim.

"Well, Dr Mortimer," presently observed Mr Maybury, "you have not come through your first day's work unscathed, I see."

For Mr Maybury felt sure that Jim would be able to give a satisfactory account of the proceedings.

Miss Bird grunted; Mr Cleave cast a glassy eye on the broccoli. Both waited for Jim's defence.

Jim laughed. "No," he said, "I met a Hooligan."

"Dear me! So soon!"

"I thought it advisable, in view of the possibility of my being some time in the district, to take a strong line from the beginning. So I led off by tackling what turned out to be the worst man of the lot."

"You have shown them that you are not a person to be trifled with?" suggested Mr Maybury, approvingly.

"That was my idea. But you may be interested to hear that another man has been put in permanent charge of the surgery--"

"Then you are no longer employed by Dr Taplow?" interrupted Mrs Maybury.

"That is so," said Jim.

"But he will still work in Mount Street," put in Koko, quickly, "as he is setting up a practice there on his own account."

They all glanced towards Koko, except Dora, who, looking at Jim, observed that he was palpably wonder-struck by Koko's remark. Jim, indeed, was as surprised as anyone at the table. What on earth was Koko driving at?

As everybody (except Dora) turned towards Koko, Mr Somers rose from the table.

"You must excuse such an unceremonious departure, Mrs Maybury," he said, "but I have just remembered that I have a most important appointment to keep. I thank you for your very kind hospitality. Jim, I should like to see you before I go."

As Koko bowed himself out, Jim, marvelling greatly, followed him. In the hall, Koko exclaimed:

"It's all right, Jim—I'll lend you the money."

"What—for me to set up against Taplow?"

"That's it. You *must* stay here, and you'll do well in Mount Street. You shall have the money in the morning, and then you can go along and rig up a place and start right off. What's the lowest figure you can begin on?"

"I don't know," said Jim. "Say fifty quid."

"You shall have it. I'll be round here with it at ten in the morning."

"But—old man—I don't like—"

"I've thought it out," said Koko, "and meant to tell you all about it after dinner, but you forced my hand by saying you'd left Taplow."

Then Koko put on his hat, opened the front door, and slipped out. Jim returned slowly to the dining-room.

"Is this true, Dr Mortimer?" asked Mrs Maybury, in a tone implying some doubt. "Are you really setting up in Mount Street on your own account?"

Jim had implicit confidence in Koko's word.

"It is quite true, Mrs Maybury," he replied, coolly, as he resumed his seat.

CHAPTER XIII.

"HARRIS & FATHER."

Mr Harris, senior partner in the firm of Harris & Son, provision dealers, Mount Street, S.E., was in a state of much tribulation. For Mr Harris, owing to an unfortunate propensity for backing horses which either came in last, or fell down and broke their legs, or behaved in some other unsatisfactory fashion, had, as the phrase is, outrun the constable, and on the day that witnessed his visit to Dr Taplow's surgery, had found himself threatened with bankruptcy and ruin.

That evening—there being no other course to pursue—he had made a clean breast of his affairs to his son Isaac, a weedy, lynx-eyed youth of a greasy and unwashed appearance.

"So dat is the case, my son," concluded Mr Harris, throwing out his hands in a gesture of despair; "and now—vot are ve to do—vot are ve to do?"

Mr Harris and his heir, it may be added, were East End Jews of a pronounced type, and their speech suggested a certain German strain in their ancestry.

"It is very sad, mine fader," replied young Harris; "it vos foolish of you to bet on dose 'orses—"

"It vos foolish of dose 'orses not to run faster!" cried Mr Harris, proceeding to cut his nails with the counter scissors.

"Don't take the edge off dose scissors, mine fader," said young Harris, snatching them away from his parent.

"And vy not? Dey are my scissors!" exclaimed Mr Harris, endeavouring to grab them back.

"Ven I haf bought dem dey vill not be yours," explained young Harris, amiably turning the point of the scissors towards his sire, so that, should the latter persist in his endeavour to regain them, he might receive some hurt from the effort.

The old dealer gazed wonderingly at his fond child. "You—you vill buy dose scissors? Ah! at the sale?"

"No—from you, mine fader. I haf saved up some money, and *I* haf backed 'orses, too. But I did notice, mine fader, dat the 'orses you did bet on did always lose, so I did always bet on dose vot you didn't, and so when you did lose I did often vin, and so, mine fader, I will buy the pizness from you—dat is to say," concluded the young man with hasty caution, "I vill pay your debts, mine fader, if you vill gif me the pizness."

"Isaac," said Mr Harris, with emotion, "do not be hard on your old fader. Think of the money I skwandered on your education, my son—think of the peautiful school I put you to ven you vos a boy—"

"It vas only fivence a veek!" retorted young Isaac, ungratefully.

"And ven you vos fourteen, my son Isaac, ven you vos an eddicated young gentleman, I took you from dat school and I put you behind the counter, and I taught you the pizness—and you had two soots of clothes a year, and a veek's 'oliday at Margit—oh! I haf been a kind fader to you, my son Isaac! Vill you lend me the money to pay my debts vith, Isaac?"

"Not a farding!" exclaimed young Harris, roughly. "You've been 'ard on me, and now I'll be 'ard on you. You've made me vork and slave while you've gone off to put money on 'orses that always fell down! Yes, you've been 'ard on me, and now I'll be—"

Here young Harris paused in his harangue. An idea occurred to him. If he bought up his father's business and turned his father out of the house, he would have to engage a shopman. That would come expensive. No, he must keep his father on, and make him help with the work.

Old Harris was quick to take advantage of the discontinuance of Isaac's discourse.

"You von't be too 'ard on me, my son?" he whined, "think of the pantermimes I took you to ven you vos a little boy."

"Vell, I vill not be 'ard on you, mine fader," responded young Harris, apparently softened by this tender reminiscence. "No, I vill tell you vot I vill do. I vill take you into partnership. You shall be as I vos—you shall haf what you haf gave me. Is not that dootiful of me, mine fader?"

Old Harris groaned. True, his son had been his partner of recent years, but Isaac's share in the business had been so small that it could hardly have been called a share, save when viewed under a microscope. However, beggars can't

be choosers, so there and then young Harris drew up a temporary agreement—to be presently made permanent in a due and proper manner by a solicitor—under which Isaac undertook to pay his father's debts (which amounted to a hundred pounds—a large sum for a small tradesman in a humble street), and Mr Harris, on his side, undertook to hand over the control of the shop to Isaac, he himself receiving board, lodging, and a share in the business, on condition he gave as much time to the business as his son had formerly devoted to it.

Thus were the tables completely turned on the unlucky provision dealer.

By way of showing that he was in earnest, and not being restrained by any false delicacy, Isaac, as soon as he had breakfasted on the following morning, went out in search of a painter. Having found a man, he brought him and his ladder and his paint-pot back with him, and set the man at once to alter the title over the shop window from "Harris & Son" to "Harris & Father."

So it came about that when Jim, having received the promised fifty pounds from Koko, walked round to see Mr Harris concerning a suitable tenement wherein he might set up as a surgeon, he found the painter just completing his task, and young Harris, with his hands in his pockets, perkily surveying the alteration.

"Hullo!" said Jim, "changes in the firm, I observe."

"Yes, doctor," said Isaac; "mine fader, he vos ruined by 'orse-racing, and so it is now my shop, and mine fader, he is my partner."

"Don't quite see how it can be your shop if he is your partner," said Jim.

"*He vill tell you,*" said Isaac, indicating the interior of the shop with a dirty forefinger; "he is cleaning the counter. Soon he vill vipe the plates and knives and forks. He is going to vork now as I did used to."

And Isaac resumed his occupation of watching the painter with a most truculent and self-satisfied expression on his face.

Jim walked into the provision shop.

"Morning, Mr Harris."

Mr Harris shook his head despondently.

"I ain't Mr 'Arris no longer," he said. "'E's Mr 'Arris. 'E's the boss. Ah, doctor," continued the old man, wiping away a tear with his shirt-sleeve, "if I'd a-known this vas goin' to 'appen—if I'd a-known that velp vos goin' to buy me up by bettin' on the 'orses I said vos no good, I—"

Mr Harris paused for breath. Jim waited for some interesting old Hebraic curse. But none came.

"—I'd never 'ave let 'im see my evenin' paper. That's vare 'e got it. I marked the 'orses I vos goin' to flutter on, and 'e saw 'em and laid accordin'!"

"Rather smart!" laughed Jim. "The firm got square with the bookies that way."

"And when I think," almost shrieked old Harris, "that 'e betted with money out of the till—that he used my money to play me that trick vith—when I think of *that*—"

Again Mr Harris paused for breath, again Jim expected a rich and fruity paternal curse, and again none such came.

"When I think of that," resumed Mr Harris, "it goes to my 'eart to remember I wouldn't buy a cash-registering machine that vos offered to me at '*arf-price* by a pawnbroker friend of mine 'oo vos giving up!"

"And why didn't you?" asked Jim.

"Vy? Vy, becos that velp yonder—young Isaac—says: 'Fader, do not buy that machine. If you do, the customers vill steal the sausages vile ve turn our backs to get the change.' That is vy. And I gave 'im a shillin' for bein' so clever. And it's a thousand pound to a little bit of cat's meat, doctor," concluded Mr Harris with great bitterness, "that 'e laid that bob on a 'orse that came 'ome!"

"Well, Mr Harris," said Jim, "I'm sorry you have been so unfortunate. But I must get on with my business. I want to open a surgery in this street, and I want you to tell me if there's a likely house about here for the purpose."

Mr Harris fixed his gaze eagerly on Jim's face, and as he did so his eyes lightened up with a great idea. What he wanted was a little ready money. Get that ready money he must, or his scheme would fail!

"Yes, doctor," he said, "I know a 'ouse. That pawnbroker friend of mine, 'e shut up 'is shop when 'e retired from business, and asked me to get a tenant for it. You shall 'ave it cheap, my dear sir. You can 'ack it about a bit, and it'll suit you fine. Come and see it—come on!"

In nervous haste the old man put on his coat and hat. "Come on, doctor," he said.

But young Isaac confronted his father at the shop door. "Vare vos you goin', mine fader?" he inquired.

"I vos goin' vith the doctor. If I oblige 'im 'e will attend us for nozzing, my son. Is that not good? Come on, doctor."

With this Mr Harris hastened past his son, and, accompanied by Jim, at length arrived at a dingy-looking shop, whose shutters bore sundry placards giving the world to understand that the place was "TO LET."

"There, doctor, that vill make you a peautiful surgery. But you shall see it." When Jim had inspected the place he decided to take it.

"What's the rent?" he asked old Harris.

"Sixty pounds a year, doctor, paid quarterly in advance."

"Do I pay you, Mr Harris?"

"Yes, you pay me," replied the dealer, hastily.

"All right. Then that's fifteen pounds. You shall have it as soon as I have

taken possession. You get a commission on this deal, eh?"

"I get a commission? Vy, yes, I would not let anything without one. I get ten per cent, doctor dear—to come off the first quarter's rent. That's six pounds. You *vill* pay me in advance, doctor, eh?"

"Oh, rather!" said Jim.

At this point Mr Harris looked cunningly at his young medical adviser. "The top part of the 'ouse, doctor dear—you will sleep in it?"

"Not I," said Jim.

"Then you will not want it?"

"Well, I suppose not."

"You will lend me the outside, then. Eh? You will lend me the wall?"

"Lend you the wall—what for?"

"First say you will lend it me!"

"Well, I'll lend it you. Now tell me what you'll do with it," said Jim.

Mr Harris rubbed his hands together. "I will let it for advertisements. It will be an 'oarding. I will let it to one of those contractors—it will be a fine 'oarding. It will not 'urt you, and it will bring me money."

"Where do *I* come in?" demanded Jim, laughing.

"Vy, it will 'elp you, my dear doctor. People will look at the 'oarding, and then they will see your plate, and then they will come in for advice, and you'll make a fortune, doctor dear—all through me! Vy, you ought to pay me for the idea!"

"I hadn't thought of it in that light," said Jim, much amused.

The old dealer chuckled with glee. "Ah, my son Isaac!" he cried, "you shall sing yet with the uzzer side of your mouth. I shall 'ave money. The evenin' paper shall come—*Isaac* will mark the 'orses now—'e will back them, *and I vill back vot 'e backs*. Then ve will see!"

"That will be a cute dodge—if it comes off!" said Jim.

"Come off—it *must!*" cried the old man, with the fatalism of the confirmed gambler, "it can't 'elp itself! Aha! And then ve will see, Isaac my son, *ve vill see!*"

CHAPTER XIV.

A PIECE OF NEWS.

Jim went to work on the ex-pawnbroking establishment with marvellous energy.

He had bank-notes in his pocket, and a compelling personality which duly influenced the workmen he engaged to make the necessary alterations. In a few days his surgery was ready, and the door of it adorned with a neat brass plate bearing his name.

Koko called and ran a critical eye over the place. "It'll do," he said; "now go ahead and cut out old Taplow."

"Well, it's all your idea," said Jim, "and carried out with your money, old man. By the way, many thanks for the loan. You bolted off in such a hurry the other day that I'd no time--"

"Had to go to a trotting match," explained Koko, briefly.

Jim was rather surprised himself at the way he had "got to work." In the morning he went off to his surgery full of zest and expectancy; his duties interested him keenly. True, very few people came to him to be doctored, but Jim had a stout heart, and thoroughly believed that he would be able to work up a good practice—in time. At present the folks round there went to the surgery they were used to—Dr Taplow's. They were yet to learn what Jim was made of. The man Taplow had "put in" was ten years older than Jim—bearded and serious, with a grave, telling manner, behind which lay (apparently) a wealth of knowledge. Jim's extreme youthfulness was against him. The ladies of the neighbourhood declared that they weren't going to be doctored by a boy like that, and Taplow's new man thrived in consequence.

But Jim Mortimer did not lose heart. Before him was Dora's face—this was the beacon that guided him and gave him hope. Dora—with whom he merely exchanged a few words daily! And so he plodded on his rounds, with Dora's eyes, as lanterns, lighting the path that he trod.

The rough whom Jim had laid out in the fashion already described had not forgotten the incident. He had a sturdy band in the neighbourhood at his call, and one night, as Jim was issuing from a house in the Blackfriars Road, he found an ill-favoured ring of louts about him. Not a policeman was in sight, but a man was hosing down the pavement. Quick as thought, Jim made a dash for the hose, and, seizing it, turned it upon the Hooligans. The volume of water scattered them in all directions, and Jim, smiling, returned the hose to the road-cleaner with many thanks and a tip.

But the human scum of which this Hooligan band was composed was not easily daunted. It was equal to almost any atrocity—any meanness. It could kick a policeman's head in, and steal his cape; it could waylay old men, rob them, and leave them half dead in the gutter. This scum could plan out its forays with deliberation and cunning. It could watch a man pace his way homewards on Monday and Tuesday, and let him go scatheless, but it would have him on Wednesday in some dark corner.

A less courageous man than Jim would have thrown up the sponge and retired to a safer neighbourhood. But Jim held on. They broke his red lamp and smashed his windows, but he merely requisitioned the services of a glazier, and hammered half the life out of a ruffian whom he found, a few nights later, about to put the knob of his stick through the new lamp. And so the Hooligans came to learn that the new doctor in Mount Street—the bearded man, curiously enough, they let severely alone—was made of about the sternest stuff they had ever encountered, and they saw that they would have to bide their time and watch most diligently for an opportunity to be revenged on him. But their desire to get even with him never abated. They were just waiting, and they knew they would not have to wait very long.

Jim used to reach the surgery in the morning about ten. Between one and two, or two and three—according to his engagements—he had his lunch at the emporium of Harris & Father, or at some other eating-house situated near his work. Tea was served to him (when he was there to have it) by an old dame whom he had engaged to look after the house and do the cleaning. This lady occupied a couple of the upper back rooms, for Mr Harris, losing no time in carrying out his hoarding scheme, had let off the upper walls of the front to a bill-posting firm, the result being that that portion of the ex-pawnbroking establishment which faced the street was soon covered with flaming placards drawing attention to whatever melodrama was being played at the local theatre. As Mr Harris had anticipated, these posters attracted much attention, and Mount Street wayfarers stopped constantly to gape at the thrilling scenes depicted in crude and aggressive colours above Jim's surgery. Not being aware of Mr Harris's responsibility for this display, Mount Street naturally conjectured that Jim Mortimer had let off the walls on his own account; and so, while some of its inhabitants expressed admiration for Jim's cuteness, others declared that a doctor ought to be above getting money in that way, adding that Taplow didn't descend to such catchpenny tricks, which showed that he could afford to do without them.

The posters were a source of constant amusement to Jim himself, and he took a keen interest in the weekly changes of the pictorial decoration of his outside walls. The men who came every Monday to paste up new "bills" soon got to know the young doctor, and one of them gruffly invited Jim to pay a call on his father-in-law, who seemed unable to throw off an obstinate attack of bronchitis. Jim promptly looked up the old man; after examining him, he stripped him to the skin and rubbed him all over with brandy. "It'll be all right," said Jim, "you'll see." And it was, for the fierce spirit drew out the inflammation, and within three days the bill-poster's father-in-law was able to go downstairs. The story of the cure, needless to say, was related in every public-house in the district—and from that hour more patients began to trickle into Mortimer's surgery.

Jim went home for dinner, but returned to his surgery directly the meal was over. One night, however, he did not go to the surgery, but, instead, stayed at No. 9 and helped Frank with his home-lessons. They had the dining-room to themselves, and were soon deeply immersed in the Rivers of Europe. Presently Dora peeped in—a little shyly, it seemed to Jim—and Frank sang out: "I say, Dora, this is a lark; come and see!"

For Jim had drawn a rough outline map of Europe, and Frank was filling in the countries and rivers, Jim holding the map proper before him and coaching his pupil with characteristic energy.

"It waggles there," Jim said, as, Dora having seated herself by her brother, Frank started on the Danube, "and now it goes straight on. Steady, man—you're making it run over a mountain. Now, waggle it a bit more. That's prime."

Frank enjoyed the lesson hugely, and presently Dora drew a river—the Rhine—and won much partial praise from Mr Mortimer.

After that Jim took Frank through his French verbs, Dora flagrantly prompting her brother, and from this they proceeded to English History, Jim giving Frank a racy description of James the Second's flight, and the causes leading up to it, which somehow stuck in Frank's head to such effect that on the following day he was awarded eighty marks out of a possible hundred, and greatly astonished his form-master by displaying such unusual evidences of industrious preparation.

It was a happy evening—Jim never remembered spending a happier—and Mortimer went to his work next day with a light heart and a most tender recollection of Dora drawing the course of a river very incorrectly.

But such happy evenings as this had been do not often occur in anybody's life—it is their unexpectedness which gives them the charm which lingers in one's memory.

Jim helped Frank on several occasions after that, but Dora did not join them. She was out, Frank supposed, with Mr Jefferson. Such announcements filled Jim with forebodings which were to be realised only too speedily.

One evening, when Jim had been established in his new surgery about three weeks, Koko looked in.

"Hullo, Koko!"

"Hullo, Jim!"

Koko sat down and glanced about him.

"Business improving, Jim?"

"Things are looking better, thanks, old man."

"And as to No. 9?"

"Cold generally; variable breezes," was Jim's weather report.

"He doesn't know yet," thought Koko. Then he added: "I met Miss Cook

to-day.”

”Oh, how is she?” said Jim, carelessly, as he went on making up medicine.

”He ought to know,” thought Koko, adding aloud: ”She’s all right. Gave me a bit of information—about Dora.”

Jim stared round at his friend with a blank look on his face. ”Eh?”

”She took a fortnight to make up her mind. She accepted him yesterday, and was wearing his ring to-day.”

”Jefferson?”

Koko nodded a grave affirmative.

CHAPTER XV. KOKO IS THANKED.

Dora often looked at her engagement ring. It was a beautiful ring, and had cost Mr Jefferson thirty pounds. Dora did not know this, but she knew it was a very expensive and valuable ring, and she was very proud of it. She often looked at it—she was for ever holding up her left hand and admiring this lovely, shining, diamond ring—this ring which glittered in dark places and flashed and twinkled even when her hand was quite still.

Dora felt that she was a very lucky girl to have a lover who could give her such a ring. Her stepmother had told her that she ought to consider herself very lucky, and so Dora supposed that she ought to. Yes, it was a beautiful ring, and Dora had blushed when Mr Jefferson had put it on her finger and kissed her. She felt that she was very fond of Mr Jefferson. Few girls, indeed, could boast such a lover as he—good-looking, perfectly dressed, the pink of politeness, and very much in love with her.

She was sure now that she was fond of him. He had proposed to her quite suddenly one night as they were driving home from the theatre. Dora had been considerably flurried by the suddenness of the proposal, and had asked for time to consider her answer. Mr Jefferson had seemed a little put out at her not accepting him at once, but with as good a grace as he could muster he had consented to give her the time she required in which to think him over, and went off for a fortnight’s shooting in Scotland.

During this period Dora gave the matter careful consideration, and discussed it with her stepmother. She did not do this very willingly, but Mrs May-

bury insisted on introducing the topic, she having been informed by Mr Jefferson of the fact that he had asked Dora to marry him. Mrs Maybury pointed out to Dora that she would, in all probability, never get such a good offer again—that it would be the wildest folly on her part to refuse Mr Jefferson. What was she—Dora? *A post-office clerk!* Did she wish to go on performing such drudgery? Of course not! This was one of a thousand reasons why she ought to accept Mr Jefferson!

As to the nine hundred and ninety-nine other reasons—well, one of them that must occur to Dora was the fact that her father was employed by the Jeffersons. It was in young Mr Jefferson's power to put Mr Maybury in a much better position at the office. Dora must bear that in mind.

But apart from all this, she had always understood that Dora was very fond of Mr Jefferson. Had she not accepted presents from him and accompanied him to the theatre, to the Exhibition, to all sorts of places? In short, Dora had encouraged him in every possible way, and Mrs Maybury was surprised—greatly surprised—to hear that Dora had even asked for time in which to consider her reply. In Mrs Maybury's opinion, Mr Jefferson had acted in a most considerate manner; he would have been justified in demanding an immediate "Yes" or "No." As it was, he had shown great forbearance.

Mrs Maybury had introduced the topic one evening when Miss Bird and Mr Cleave were present, as well as herself and Dora. She supposed that they both knew that Mr Jefferson had proposed to Dora. They would, therefore, be rather surprised to hear that Dora had asked for time in which to consider her answer.

"Ridiculous!" said Miss Bird. "She ought to write and accept him at once. What do you say, Mr Cleave?"

"Didn't quite catch—" replied Mr Cleave, putting his hand up to his ear.

"I say she ought to write and accept him at once!" howled Miss Bird.

Mr Cleave nodded rapidly. "Yes, an admirable offer. A most temperate young man. Yes—as you say—at once!"

"I am sure, Mr Cleave, I can get on quite well without your advice!" snapped Dora.

"My advice," said Mr Cleave, who only caught the last word of her sentence, "is to accept him. Yes, a good match. A most temperate young man."

"It's got nothing to do with temperance," roared Miss Bird.

Mr Cleave heard this remark—the people in the next house probably did as well—and looked at Miss Bird reproachfully.

"I hope you are not falling away from the Cause?" he said.

"It's got nothing to do with the Cause!" bellowed Miss Bird. "What I say is, a bad husband is better than no husband at all. Even a pretty girl doesn't get too many offers nowadays. Mr Jefferson will make a very good husband, and if

Dora doesn't accept him she'll be a fool!"

"You hear what Miss Bird says!" observed Mrs Maybury, looking at Dora.

"Thank you," said Dora, in an icy voice, "I think I can manage my affairs without assistance from Miss *Bird!*"

With which declaration she flung off to bed.

Eventually, however, she accepted Mr Jefferson. The argument that weighed with her most was that by becoming engaged to Mr Jefferson she could not help but benefit her father. One of the first things Mr Jefferson would do (asseverated Mrs Maybury), after becoming engaged to Dora, would be to find some way of bettering Mr Maybury's position at the office.

It must be borne in mind, too, that Dora was by no means indifferent to Mr Jefferson. Had he suddenly ceased to pay her attentions she would have felt greatly hurt and annoyed, for she had become accustomed to his society, and always enjoyed herself very much whenever he took her out.

"Oh, Miss, what a *lovely* ring!" cried Mary, when she saw the trinket with which Jefferson had clinched the engagement; "oh! what gleamin' jools! What a rich gentleman he must be, Miss! Dr Mortimer couldn't give you a ring like that, Miss—he's too poor!"

Dora, who had been allowing the little servant to examine the ring (they were in her bedroom at the time, which was bedtime), drew her hand away sharply.

"Don't be so silly, Mary. You really are very stupid sometimes; you say such absurd things."

"I didn't mean anything, Miss," replied Mary, who had really spoken quite innocently; "it only came into my head, like."

"Then you have a very silly head!" exclaimed Dora.

Mary was going out of the room when Dora called her back.

"I'm so tired, Mary. Would you mind brushing my hair for me?"

"Of course I will, Miss," cried Mary (who had been pattering about since six in the morning); "I always *love* to do things for you, Miss!"

Dora sat down in front of the looking-glass, and Mary took her hair down and combed it and brushed it, "just like a grand lady's," as she said.

"I expect you'll have your own maid when you're married to Mr Jefferson, Miss," added Mary.

Dora made no reply. She was thinking—and the poor overworked little servant, with her woman's instinct, divined her thoughts.

"Don't you think, Miss," she said, presently, "that Dr Mortimer's thinner than when he first came?"

"Oh, I haven't noticed it," said Dora, carelessly.

"I have," returned Mary.

She brushed away vigorously without speaking for some little time, and then she said: "I wonder if he's in love, Miss!"

"Who?" demanded Dora, quite unnecessarily.

"Why, Miss, Dr Mortimer!"

"How should I know!" cried Dora. "Please be quick, Mary—I'm so tired."

"I sometimes think that he is," continued the sentimental little servant, "by the look in his eyes, Miss. I should think," added Mary thoughtfully "that he would be a very faithful lover, like the knights and barons you read of in books. Don't you think so too, Miss?"

"What idiotic things you say, Mary!" cried Dora, impatiently. "There, I think you've brushed my hair quite enough. Thank you very much."

"Quite welcome, Miss," said the little servant; "Good-night, Miss!"

"Good-night, Mary."

The diamond ring, twinkling and flashing, attracted a good deal of attention at the post-office. The other clerks went into raptures about it, and told Dora that she was a very lucky girl. Everybody—it seemed to Dora—said she was a lucky girl. Dora did not altogether appreciate being informed so frequently of her stupendous luck. After all, this ring was only the symbol of a bargain. Was she not giving herself in exchange for it? She did not put the matter to herself quite in these words, but this was the drift of her reflections on the subject. Why should she be considered so very, very lucky?

Miss Cook and she got away from the post-office early one afternoon.

"We will have a nice tea somewhere," said Dora; "I will treat you, dear."

"Shall we go to tea with Mr Somers?" suggested Miss Cook.

"Mr Somers! But he will be out."

"No, he won't. I saw him last night at the house of some friends of mine, and he told me he would be in to-day. I knew we should get off early to-day, and so I asked him," added Miss Cook, a little shamefacedly.

Dora sighed. She was fond of Miss Cook, and she was afraid that Mr Somers was never likely to take a fancy to her friend.

"Very well, dear; we will go and see Mr Somers."

They turned their steps, therefore, in the direction of the Adelphi, where, along a modest terrace, Koko did dwell.

Presently Dora said: "What friends did you go to see last night, Rose?"

"Oh, some old friends of ours—not at all grand. He is a bookseller."

"I suppose he has all the new novels. I wonder if he ever reads them!"

"He doesn't have any new novels, Dora. He is a second-hand bookseller. He deals in all sorts of old books."

"Oh!" said Dora. "Mr Somers is very fond of collecting old books, isn't he?"

"Yes, he has found some very good ones in the twopenny boxes—you know—

the boxes which they mark 'THIS LOT 2d.'

Dora laughed.

"Does Mr Somers go routing about for old books in those boxes?"

"Yes; he has made several 'finds,' as he calls them. My friend bought some from him a short time ago."

"What! has he been selling them again?"

"Yes; I wonder why! He called on my friend quite late one night, and sold him twelve very valuable books. He got fifty pounds for them. I wonder why he sold them—he is so fond of his old books! But here we are! Isn't it a queer, musty old place!"

Koko received the girls with a smile of genuine pleasure. He bustled about and got tea for them, and then Dora played to them both on a very old but still tuneful piano that Koko had picked up at a sale years since.

Then, while Miss Cook sat down and tried to pick out a march on the piano, Koko showed Dora his treasures, and spent quite a time telling her little anecdotes as to how this book and that book had come into his possession. While he talked, Dora was putting two and two together. She remembered how amazed Jim had looked when Koko said he was going to set up in Mount street, and she remembered how Koko had hurried away in the middle of dinner. She understood now why he had done so.

"Some have gone from here," said Dora, pointing to a gap in one of the shelves.

"Yes," said Koko, in an off-hand way, "I have a clear-out occasionally."

"Did you sell them?" she asked.

"Rather—I don't give my books away."

"And did you get a good price for them?"

"Fair," said Koko; "yes, a fair price."

Miss Cook ended up with a loud and inharmonious chord, and rose from the piano.

"Come, Dora—we must be going."

"Oh, don't go yet," urged Koko.

"We must—it is getting late, and Dora is expected at home. Good-bye, Mr Somers."

They shook hands, and Miss Cook sauntered out into the passage.

And now Dora had to say good-bye.

"Mr Somers—I know why you sold those books. You wanted to help Dr Mortimer."

Koko gazed at her for a few moments without speaking, and then said, quite simply: "Yes, I did. Jim's my best friend. I'd do anything to help him."

As he spoke, his glance wandered to the half-emptied shelf. Much as he

[image]

"HE'S MY BEST FRIEND," SAID KOKO.

loved his old books, however, he did not regret his recent sacrifice.

"You are a very good man, Mr Somers—very kind and good. I only wish," she added, with demure hesitation, "that I were a little younger, for then it would be quite proper for me to—to kiss you."

"Are you coming, Dora?" Miss Cook was growing impatient.

Koko turned to Dora with a smile and took her hand.

"If I were a little younger, perhaps it would not be proper," he said gently, "but as I'm ever so much older than you, don't you think that—"

"Why, yes," said Dora, and, bending swiftly, she kissed him.

CHAPTER XVI.

JIM'S PATIENTS.

Thereafter, watching his friend closely, Koko observed a gradual change over-coming Jim. Often enough Jim's merry smile flashed up, 'tis true, but when it died away the normal expression it left on his face was not quite what it had been of yore. There was a wistfulness in Jim's eyes nowadays that Koko had never seen there before.

This change made clear to Koko the fact that Jim's medical student cub-bishness had largely taken wing. Jim was no longer Fortune's spoiled boy. The outline of his face was less round, his features were more distinctive, his chin seemed set in a firmer mould, and the soft lines about the corners of his mouth, though still apparent, were not so soft as they had been but a few months since.

Koko was particularly struck by the alteration in Jim when, after a fortnight's absence in the country, he looked the Long 'Un up at his surgery one evening in the latter part of November.

Jim greeted his friend warmly, offered him a cigar, poked up the fire, and then, by way of avoiding more awkward topics, began to talk about his work.

He had much of interest to relate of his daily rounds, and Koko, listening in the kind of way that is so helpful to a talker—that is to say, with unassumed

appreciation—realised that Jim had indeed tackled a hard nut in the Mount Street district. For Jim had to go into such slums as your apple-faced peasant in the wide, wind-blown shires would not live in rent free. In these foul places herded scum from across the seas that gloried in its filth, and regarded decent quarters with positive repugnance. Jim had to make his way through crooked alleys into crime-infested courts—into courts where no policeman would go unaccompanied by a fellow. Jim went alone, however, trusting to luck and his two good fists to get out again in the event of his meeting a hostile gang of Hooligans.

Jim told Koko of a squalid room he had that day been into which contained four separate families—each family occupying a corner.

Koko smiled. "I suppose they don't mind it?" he said.

"Mind it!" cried Jim. "Why, they like it, man! Being a lot in a room keeps them warm. They're company for each other. When number one family has a scrap with number two, three and four look on and applaud. Nice friendly arrangement—eh?"

"Don't some of these scraps turn out seriously?"

"Sometimes. The fellow who showed me up to-day is known to have killed a man in a scrap—but he got off by some queer hitch in the evidence. A very civil spoken chap—burglar by profession."

Koko opened his eyes. "A bit different from taking fees in Harley Street?" he said.

"Not so remunerative, but more exciting," returned Jim. "The other day," he added, "I was attending a woman, when her husband came up with a crowbar and told me to stand aside, as he wanted to 'finish' her."

"What did you do?"

"Asked him to wait till I'd done with her. He said he would if I'd have a drink, so we had some gin together, and then he lay down in a corner, saying he'd finish her after he'd had a nap. The lady told me not to worry, as he'd be as gentle as a lamb when he'd slept his drink off. She understood him, you see."

"She'd a fine nerve," commented Koko.

"Another time," continued Jim, "I was called to see an old chap who lived by himself in a garret. He'd got D.T.s very hot indeed, and was sitting up in bed with the counterpane covered with sovereigns and bank-notes. There must have been hundreds of pounds there. Miser, I suppose. When I arrived he was holding conversations with imaginary relatives who were evidently (in his opinion) after his cash. He was threatening one with a revolver, and calling him all sorts of purple names. It was the revolver business which made the other people in the house send for me. To oblige him, I threw his imaginary relatives out of the window, and told him they'd fallen on their heads in the court below. That pleased him, and he said he would like to reward me for my trouble. I thought he was going to

press a tenner on me, but instead he asked me if I could change half-a-sovereign. I said I could, and he then gave me half-a-crown."

Koko chuckled joyously. "And after that?"

"Then a few dozen more imaginary relatives came in, and I threw them all out of the window. After a bit of a struggle with himself he gave me another shilling for doing this, and then I sent him to a hospital, money and all, and there he croaked, and now they can't find a single real relative to take over his property."

Jim discoursed for some time about his experiences, but at length Koko had to hasten away to fulfil an engagement, and so Jim locked up his surgery and bent his steps homewards.

Trudging down Blackfriars Road, he found a barrel-organ playing at the point where a by-street branched off in the direction of Derby Crescent. Jim loved a barrel-organ, and stopped to listen to this one. The organ-grinder had chosen a good pitch, in the glare of a great electric lamp-post. There was a small crowd of wayfarers watching a number of little girls dancing in front of the organ. Jim watched them too, and was delighted with the performance, for the little maids danced with thorough enjoyment and kept perfect time. One or two couples of grown-up girls were waltzing to the music—although the organ wasn't playing a waltz—but Jim was not interested in these.

Jim had visited many a music-hall in the company of Koko, the red-haired student at Matt's, and others, and had frequently watched the skilful gyrations of trained ballet-dancers, but it seemed to him that this queer little dance, with the heavens for a roof and a muddy wood-block road for a floor, was a much better dance than any he had seen in a music-hall. The organ played a merry tune—full of straightforward melody—and Jim was quite infected with it. He began to wonder when he had last danced—when he would dance again. And meanwhile he watched the little maids, and smiled at the earnest way in which they tripped in and out among each other, quite in the proper style and order; and he gave a shilling to the Italian woman who came round to collect.

As Jim listened to the music and watched the dainty steps of the little street dancers, he felt genuinely happy. The scene pleased him; it chased the wistfulness from his face, and he felt loth to continue his walk homewards. He was interested. These people around him were his people now; these people were his patients. Poor they were—starving, some of them—and he was their doctor. Had matters fallen out otherwise, it would have been his destiny to attend a very different class of patient. He would, in all probability, have assisted his grandfather—have ridden a horse, worn the best of clothes, and eaten and drunk "like a lord." He would have hunted and shot, and lived the life of a country gentleman, with just enough work to do to prevent himself from experiencing ennui. But instead

of that he was fighting for an existence in Mount Street—among the poorest of the poor. No hunting, no shooting, no old port; it was grim fighting in Mount Street—hard work and a hard life—hardly earned money and money hard to get, even when he had earned it.

Still, he reflected, he *lived*. It was life—he lived strenuously. He was working in the heart of the greatest city in the world; he was living a man’s life. Wasn’t this, after all, better than lolling round a ready-made practice? Of course, that was good work, useful work—but this work in Mount Street was on a different plane. It was sheer fighting, and Jim, being a “scrapper” by nature, was filled with a feeling of fierce joy. He knew that he had played the fool, and that this was the penalty. But it was a penalty of a mixed kind, for it was a test which he relished. It was a test which would have knocked out a weak man, but Jim felt that he was getting a firmer foothold every day he trod the grimy pavement leading to his surgery.

Presently the little girls stopped—panting—and the organ-grinder dropped his handle. It was time he moved on.

So it was over, and Jim found himself feeling sorry. The other onlookers strolled away, and Jim was turning down the by-street, when he felt a touch on his arm, and looked round to find Dora Maybury by his side.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE CRESCENT.

This was the first time Jim had met Dora all by herself without the stronghold—No. 9, to wit. And there he had found few opportunities to say anything to her that was not formal and commonplace; indeed, their intercourse, with watching eyes and listening ears about them, had been (to Jim, at any rate) of a gallingly circumscribed character.

It is poor satisfaction, when the heart is hungry, to look into the eyes one loves, and remark that it is colder than it was yesterday; your lover is kept on conversation’s shortest commons when, though burning to say a thousand tender things to the one girl he holds most precious, he has, perforce, to hazard a remark to the effect that there may be rain before morning.

Thus it was with Jim. He often saw Dora, but seldom spoke with her. There was that evening when she drew the course of the Rhine under his tutelage—but

that was a memory by itself—a verdant oasis in the desert of verbal starvation!

It may be easily imagined, therefore, how fast beat Jim's heart when he found himself absolutely alone—and unwatched—with Dora Maybury.

"Have you too been listening to the organ?" he asked.

"Yes," said Dora, "I was there when you came up. I have been shopping. Frank came out with me, but disappeared."

Jim devoutly hoped that Frank would not reappear. Dora was carrying a heavy marketing-net—the shops keep open late in Blackfriars Road—and Jim promptly possessed himself of this.

"Frank ought to have been carrying it," explained Dora, as they walked down the by-street, "but," she added, "you know what brothers are!"

"I have heard accounts of them," said Jim, "but can't speak from experience, as I haven't any."

"Nor sisters?"

"Nor sisters either," said Jim; "nobody, in fact, but a grandfather."

"Dear me!" said Dora, "what a very lonely boy you must have been! I suppose your grandfather is very fond of you?"

"I think he has a sort of mild affection for me," said Jim, "but unfortunately I offended him when I—er—when I was put on *The Total Abstainers* black list."

Dora seemed interested.

"And what did he do?" she inquired.

"He behaved in a manner that was not even mildly affectionate."

"And you don't see him now?"

Jim admitted that that was so.

"But perhaps he will make it up at Christmas-time," suggested Dora. "He ought to."

Jim shook his head.

"My grandfather is not the sort of man to do anything because he ought to."

"Oh, I hope he will," said Dora; "it must be so wretched for you—having nobody."

"You are very kind," said Jim, his voice suddenly changing.

"But surely," said Dora, quickly, "anybody would be sorry for a man who had nobody in the world to care for him."

Jim made no rejoinder. So Dora, meaning only to make him feel that she sympathised with his position, said again that she hoped all would be right between him and his grandfather by the time Christmas came.

"But you have friends," she continued, comfortingly; "there is Mr Somers, and Sir Savile and I know my father likes you—oh yes, you have friends. You must not be disheartened. You must look upon us all as your friends, Dr Mortimer."

"I did not mean to extract all this sympathy from you, Miss Dora," said Jim. "I was only answering your questions."

"But I am glad you have told me," said Dora, "because I did not know all this about you before. And I am so sorry for people who have no home," she added, gently.

So spoke this maid, barely nineteen, in the innocent warmth of her nature. She could not have remembered that a man can bear taunts, abuse, sarcasm, and show a smiling front, but that the least word of sympathy will break down the same man's defences and leave his heart-hardened to all else-without a shield.

"You are too kind," said Jim again; "it would be better, perhaps, if you were not kind to me at all."

Then a silence fell upon them, and in silence they passed from the by-street into the crescent, whose glory was so faded. They walked by several of the shabby houses, still without speaking, but as they drew near to No. 9, the question Dora wanted to ask would not stay within her lips.

"Why?" she said, without looking at him.

"Because," replied Jim, steadily, "I love you. That is why it will be the kindest thing on your part never to be kind to me again."

As Jim spoke, Dora gazed up at him in a surprised, half-frightened manner. When she said "Why?" she knew very well that there was no need on her part to ask such a question. Her woman's instinct told her "why"; there was no need for Jim to do so. But, with a wilful disregard of conscience, which bade her not inquire too closely into Jim's reasons for that little speech, she had allowed her lips to shape the word that had extracted so blunt a confession from her companion.

Even had she not been engaged to Jefferson, Jim's avowal, considering the length of their acquaintance and the very small amount of conversation they had enjoyed together, would have been ill-timed and premature. As matters stood, Jim had no possible right to speak thus. But she had asked "Why?" and he had told her.

Jim himself, as soon as he had spoken, condemned himself for a fool, an ass, and an idiot. This would put an end to any little friendship that might have hitherto existed between them. What could he do to mend the sorry mistake his tongue had made?

He was the first to break the awkward silence. He laughed. Dora, on the other hand, bit her lip nervously.

"Please don't take me too seriously, Miss Dora," said Jim.

"So," said Dora, confronting him with dignity and flaming cheeks, "I am to regard what you said just now as a joke?"

"Well-if you like," replied Jim, rather awkwardly.

"Then I think you are very rude!" exclaimed Dora, "and I won't speak to

you again.”

She turned abruptly toward the steps leading up to the door of No. 9.

”Oh, I say, come now,” expostulated Jim, ”I think that is a little too severe. You asked ’Why?’ and I told you ’Why!’”

Dora switched round to him and turned a very red little face, illuminated by eyes that flashed with anger, up to his.

”You had no right to say what you did just now, because you know I am engaged to Mr Jefferson—”

”Lucky man?” sighed Jim.

”Are you still regarding me as a person just to be joked with?” demanded Dora, with something like a sob in her voice.

”No,” said Jim, earnestly, ”as a girl to be loved for ever and ever!”

Jim’s astonishing comprehensiveness struck Dora dumb for a moment. What *could* a girl do with a man like this!

Dora considered what she could say that would make a good rebuke. And meanwhile she looked (as Jim declared to himself) bewilderingly lovely.

”What you said, considering the circumstances,” she continued at length, ”was dishonourable and ungentlemanly.”

”I plead guilty on both counts,” said Jim.

”And so,” Dora went on, ”I shall not speak to you again—ever.”

”I think,” replied Jim, ”that you are taking far too harsh a view of the case. If you will walk round the crescent just *once* with me, I will try to put myself right in your eyes.”

”That you can never do,” said Dora. But, after a moment’s hesitation, she lifted her skirt and walked on, and Jim, with an overflowing heart, paced along by her side.

”I know you are engaged, of course,” began Jim, ”and I know that I ought not to have said what I did, that being the case.”

”Then why did you say it?” demanded Dora, with an imperious little stamp of her foot.

”I couldn’t help it,” said Jim; ”you are so pretty. You are the prettiest girl I have ever seen—the prettiest, the daintiest, and the sweetest. There is nothing on earth I wouldn’t do for you, even to the laying down of my life, if that would serve you. I have loved you from the first moment I ever set eyes on you, and I shall never love another girl as long as I live.”

Thus spoke Jim in the fulness of his heart, and his words were as music in Dora’s ears; for what woman—worthy of the name—would be displeased by such a confession? That was Jim’s speech—those were Jim’s sentiments—hackneyed sentiments enough in all conscience, seemingly, and yet not hackneyed at all, because they were quite fresh and sincere. He meant them, he felt them. Never

did love speak more honestly.

Yet there was a ring on Dora's finger—a ring—an emblem of her plighted troth. And this ring seemed to burn into her finger and reproach her for even letting this other lover complete his declaration.

"You are making it worse and worse," she said, but not at all crossly.

"Well," said Jim, "you know now. You can tell Jefferson what I've said if you like. I've told you I love you, and why. I've got it off my mind, and I shan't be so miserable now."

"Have—have you been miserable?" asked Dora, very gently.

"Yes," said Jim.

"*Very?*"

"As miserable," said Jim, "as a man could be."

"Oh," said Dora, "I'm so sorry! I suppose I ought to be angry with you, but I don't see how I can be when you—*you* like me so much."

Jim looked up at the sky with a mist in his eyes. They walked on, and all too soon came round to No. 9 again.

"Oh, if you please, give me my net," said Dora, for all this time her purchases had been dangling from Jim's left hand. She had forgotten all about them, and Jim had been quite unconscious of his burden.

"Then," said Jim, as they stopped in the shadow thrown by the porch, "you forgive me?"

"Yes, yes, entirely—on condition you never say anything like that again. And now give me my net."

"Here is the net," said Jim, "and here," as he kissed her, "is something else."

"Oh, how dare you!" cried Dora, snatching at her net and running up the steps with cheeks of scarlet.

As for Jim, he diplomatically continued his walk round the crescent.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MASTER HARRIS IS SHOWN OUT.

One evening, a week or two later, Koko was sitting with his short legs propped up over the Long 'Un's surgery fire. During a pause in the conversation he observed Jim fumbling in his inner coat pocket.

"Twenty-five," said Jim, at length, handing his friend that amount in bank-

notes; "half what I owe you."

"Don't bother about that yet," said Koko, tossing them back.

"If you don't take them," said Jim, in a ferocious tone, "I'll make you eat them."

"Try it on, you bully!" returned Koko, springing up.

Jim therefore squeezed the notes up into a round, tight ball, and advanced upon the little man.

"Be careful, my son," said Koko; "if I hit you, it'll hurt."

For answer Jim leapt forward like a bloodhound, seized Koko by his coat-collar, and threw him on to the floor. Koko, however, nimble as a kitten, wriggled through Jim's legs, overturning the Long 'Un in so doing, and with a dexterous movement seated himself astride Jim's chest.

Jim puffed and fumed, and tried every trick he could think of to throw off his assailant. But Koko was not easily beaten. A rough-and-tumble with Mortimer was nothing new to him. For some time he resisted Jim's efforts to dislodge him, and Jim was getting redder in the face every moment.

"Make me eat 'em, will he!" cried Koko, exultingly, addressing Tom, the big cat, who still often followed Jim to the surgery, and was now watching the struggle with grave impartiality. "Not a long lamp-post like this, without enough fat on him to grease a cart-wheel!"

Now, it's an old sporting saying that a good big 'un is better than a good little 'un—it holds in boxing, wrestling, and many other forms of athletics. Koko was a good little 'un, but Jim was a good big 'un, and, though not of great girth, was immensely strong in the arms and back.

There is also an old saying that you shouldn't laugh till you're out of the wood. Jim proved the truth of both sayings on this occasion, for, just as Koko finished his taunting speech, Jim clutched him round the ribs, and, with a prodigious output of nervous energy, threw the little man clean over his head.

Koko flew crash into one of the rotten old pawn-broking cupboards with which the place was lined, and such was the force with which he was impelled that his head and shoulders went right through the door of the cupboard. Before he could extricate himself, Mortimer had pinned his hands to his sides.

"Will you give in?" demanded Jim.

"I will," murmured Koko from within the cupboard.

"And take what I owe you?"

"Yes—let me out of this old clo' hole, will you?"

"Certainly."

Thereupon, with a neat wrench, Jim liberated his friend, and Koko rose to his feet, looking battered and sorry for himself.

"You ought to know better than to scrap with me, young fellow," said Jim;

"you ought to know it's no use."

Koko rubbed his bald head ruefully. "Give me a bran mash," he said; "that winded me."

"Right you are," said the Long 'Un, taking a glass jar off one of the shelves.

"Steady!" cried Koko, observing the label on the jar; "that's prussic acid."

Jim, however, got two tumblers and proceeded to measure out a couple of drams.

"No—I keep my whisky in this jar," he said, drawing some fresh water from the tap; "it's safer here. Mrs Brown, my old lady upstairs, has a liking for whisky, and used to help herself out of my bottle when I was out—so I got a clean jar, put a prussic acid label on it, filled it with whisky, and now she hunts in vain."

"Smart man, Jim," laughed Koko, who then proceeded to roll out the notes and put them carefully away in his pocket-book.

"You see," said Jim, when they had settled themselves down by the fire, "I've been catching on about here lately."

"Cutting out the bearded man?"

"Something like that. I was going down Pine Court soon after you last looked me up, when I saw a group of women talking excitedly round a doorway. I had a case on the top floor of the house. 'Wot I says is,' I heard a very fat woman remark, 'there ain't no symptoms to go by. 'E guessed it!'

"I always talk to these people, so, as I was passing into the house, I said: 'Who guessed it?' They turned to me and began talking all at once, and I gathered from their observations that the fat woman's little girl was down with what our bearded friend at Taplow's had diagnosed as small-pox. It appeared that he had made a report to the Medical Officer of Health for this district, and that the hospital people's ambulance was momentarily expected. The fat woman vehemently declared that our bearded friend was wrong. 'What makes you think it isn't small-pox?' I said. 'Why, doctor,' says she, 'my Annie ain't been sick, eats 'earty, and sleeps sound, and is well in 'erself. 'E only went by the spots.' 'Well,' I said, 'they'll tell you at the hospital whether it's small-pox or not.' But at that she began painting the air blue with her language, and swore no ambulance men should touch the kid. After a time she asked me to look at the child, but I explained that it was Dr Taplow's case, and nothing to do with me. She then asked whether a lady couldn't take two doctors' opinions on a case, and I replied that a lady certainly could. 'Well, then,' says she, 'why shouldn't a pore woman like me?' I recognised the justice of this, and, after I'd been to my case, I took a look at the child. I saw at once it wasn't small-pox—"

"The chicken variety?" put in Koko.

"Not even that—simply blood out of order. I told her the child wanted some medicine and more fresh air. As luck had it, the Medical Officer—old Jackson—

awfully nice chap—being scared by the report, came with the ambulance himself, and corroborated my verdict. I had cleared off by then, but the next time I went to Pine Court I found myself famous, and ever since they've been coming to me instead of to the bearded pard."

"Good," said Koko. "Have you caught him napping again?"

"Curiously enough, I have. He told a woman in Mount Street that her husband—a plumber—was suffering from heart disease. His feet were swollen, and he was pretty bad all over. However, she wasn't satisfied, and came to me, and I found the fellow really had a congested liver. I dosed him with calomel, and he was running up and down ladders again in a few days."

"That was another ad.," said Koko.

"It was," said Jim. "Have another two-penn'orth?"

Koko nodded, and Jim was reaching for the mislabeled bottle, when a quaint metal Chinaman, that stood in the middle of the mantelpiece, fell with a crash on to his face.

"Hullo!" cried Koko, much mystified, for neither he nor Jim had touched the ornament.

Jim laughed. "That's all right—shows there's somebody at the front door. You see there's a bell, but my callers don't always use it. Some of them like to walk in, as the door opens when you turn the handle. I've fixed up an arrangement of string, therefore, which causes that old geezer to fall down when the front door is opened. Quite simple. I'll show you the dodge in a minute."

Whilst he had been speaking, Jim had popped the prussic acid jar on its shelf, and opened the door communicating with the waiting-room.

"Ah, Mr Harris! Good evening! Come in!"

The old provision dealer—for it was he—walked into the surgery. Koko made as if he would withdraw, but Jim motioned to him to stop.

"I'm pretty near done, doctor," said Mr Harris, sinking wearily into a chair; "my 'ead feels as if my 'air was bein' brushed more than ever. And that velp—'e's gettin' more a caution every day. 'E tumbled to my game, and marked the wrong 'orses for me to back—and my money's all gone. Yes, vot vith 'im and my 'ealth, I wish I vos dead."

"You don't get enough fresh air, Mr Harris," said Jim.

"Fresh air!" cried the old man; "no, not a mouthful. Not likely. That boy—that son of mine—Isaac—'e's a 'eartless young 'ound. Keeps 'is old father vorkin' and vorkin' from seven in the mornin' till ten at night. Fresh air! Vy, I falls asleep in my chair ven I've locked up the shop!"

Koko and Jim looked sympathetic, but made no comment.

"Now 'e's boss," proceeded the old dealer—"now 'e's 'Arris, and I'm only the *Father*, there's no end to the airs he gives 'isself. Wears a red veskit and a

big chain and a norty turn-down collar like vot the swells wear, and a check soot vich 'e got second-'and from a bookmaker. There's no 'oldin' 'im!" declared Mr Harris, with a groan.

He paused a moment to wag his head sorrowfully, and then again took up the tale of his woes.

"So vot vith Isaac, and vot vith this 'air brushin' a-always goin' on on the top of me 'ead, I feel pretty near like throwin' myself inter the river and settlin' it all that vay. Not that Isaac would care—not 'e! 'E'd bury me as cheap as possible, and think it 'ard lines I vosn't voshed out to sea instead of bein' brought 'ome to cause 'im expense!"

"Well, well," said Jim, soothingly, "I'll give you some medicine that'll make you feel very much better, Mr Harris. You're run down, and that's why you feel so despondent."

"The real reason vy," continued Mr Harris, as Jim got up to prepare the medicine, "I don't do away vith myself *is*, I vant to stay by Isaac's side and go on varnin' 'im agen Rebecca Nathan. She's a designin' minx—she's just leadin' Isaac on to get vot she can out of 'im."

"What—has your son got a young woman?"

"*Young voman!* Vy, she's older than Isaac by ten years, and Isaac's twenty-four. 'E's infatooated, *is* Isaac. 'E leans 'er photograrf agen the corfee pot an' sighs venever 'e looks at it, and 'e puts it just vare 'e'll see it ven 'e vakes in the mornin'. 'E bought her a flash diamond brooch, but she noo better than to be took in that vay, so 'e 'ad to buy 'er a real one. She's the sharpest bit of female-goods in Mount Street—father keeps the fried-fish shop by the 'Lord Nelson."

"I know the place," said Jim.

"Eaps o' money," continued Mr Harris, "but do you think my son Isaac vill ever get even a *sniff* at it? Not 'e! Rebecca Nathan vill marry a gentleman, doctor dear—she's only *usin'* Isaac!"

"Here's the medicine, Mr Harris. Take a wine-glassful after each meal."

"Vell, I don't believe any medicine in the vorld vill do me any good," said Mr Harris, "but I'll take it, so it von't be vasted. Yes, I'll be gettin' back now. That velp Isaac, 'e's goin' to take Rebecca to a music-'all—yes, in the two-bob seats. 'E never spent more than sixpence on a seat in 'is life before. Larst veek 'e took 'er to 'ave 'er 'ead told by a phrenologist feller, and then 'e 'ad 'is own told, and came 'ome with it all swelled up because the phrenologist said 'e 'ad a big bump of locality and noo 'is vay about."

At that moment the surgery bell rang, and directly after the little Chinaman fell bang on to his nose.

Jim opened the door of communication.

"It is your son," he informed Mr Harris. "Come in," he added, addressing

the caller.

The senior partner of the firm of Harris & Father strutted into the surgery. For Mount Street, his attire was resplendent, though, to be sure, the suit he had bought from the bookmaker seemed a couple of sizes too large for him.

"Fader," he said, irritably, "ow much longer am I to wait?"

"I'm comin', Isaac, I'm comin'," replied the old Jew, putting on his hat and seizing his medicine with trembling hands; "I vos only takin' a little advice for my 'ealth, Isaac."

"You vos takin' all the evenin' to take it," snapped Isaac; "come on—quick!"

The old man nodded hurriedly to Jim and Koko, and left the surgery.

The young Jew turned to Jim.

"See 'ere," he said. "Ven my fader comes 'ere, send him 'ome sharp. That's 'is place—'ome."

"Your father is not at all well," said Jim, "so when he comes here I shall allow him to stay as long as he likes, if that is any comfort to him."

"You've a nice sauce," said Master Harris, who felt very brave in his loud toggery.

For reply, Jim inserted one finger inside Master Harris's collar, conducted him (held thuswise) to the front door, and shot him into the street. And when Jim discovered that Miss Rebecca Nathan was waiting outside for Master Harris, and thus witnessed the latter's discomfiture, he laughed a great laugh, and walked back to the surgery little thinking that his short way with Isaac Harris was destined to bring dire ill upon himself.

CHAPTER XIX.

HARD PRESSED.

On the day preceding the departure of the students from Matt's for the brief Christmas vacation, things were very lively indeed at the hospital.

Soon after breakfast, Tom Deadwood, one of the most dissipated characters connected with the institution and Teddy Mildmay, his faithful henchman and boon companion—celebrated for his speed of foot, being, in fact, an old Cambridge "blue"—walked into the house-surgeon's room looking bleared and dishevelled. Their story was that they had careered about London in a four-wheel cab (and occasionally on the top of it), with frequent stops for refreshment, until the small

hours of the morning, and finally found themselves in the vicinity of Covent Garden market. Here Tom, who was a "bruiser" of parts, tackled a gigantic porter, and after (according to his own account) "slaying" this worthy, fought two other men, Mildmay contenting himself with inspiring his friend with bits of ring wisdom, and at the conclusion of each combat demanding cheers for the reigning monarch.

Eventually a policeman hove in sight in one direction, and three others in three other directions, and then there ensued a chase of a most varied and engrossing description, the market porters, who took a sporting interest in the matter, giving the fugitives many tips as to the best way to run in order to avoid capture. Mildmay, had he been by himself, could have escaped easily, so fleet of foot was he, but Tom Deadwood was blown by his series of scraps with the porters, so in the end they were captured and afforded a night's lodging at Bow Street police-station. At breakfast-time they were allowed to depart, Mr Deadwood having told the superintendent that his mother, who had not seen him for five years, was expecting him home early in the afternoon. The superintendent grimly gave it as his opinion that the colour of her boy's eyes and the state of his nose would give the poor lady a bit of a shock. Having told their story to the Matt's staff, they cleaned themselves and sallied forth in search of breakfast. After this they settled themselves down to a long morning's beer and billiards. Returning to the hospital about one o'clock, they found the red-haired student, who has already figured in this story, marshalling a number of his fellows preparatory to leading them out for a slight midday snack.

Having lined them up in single file—Messrs Deadwood and Mildmay taking their places at the end of the line,—the Welshman placed himself at the right hand of No. 1, and gave the word to "Quick—March!"

In perfect order and comic solemnity the students tramped out of the hospital precincts, wheeled into the road, and proceeded along the extreme outside of the pavement until they arrived at an A B C shop. Obeying the word of command on the instant, and still preserving splendid order, they wheeled into the establishment—their captain holding the door open for them—and took their seats at a group of tables.

The red-haired one approached a waitress.

"Sixteen scones, sixteen butters, and sixteen cups of coffee!"

The giggling girl having provided these refreshments, the students fell to, and very soon the order was repeated. The Welshman then collected elevenpence from each man and paid the score, the extra penny a head being levied as a *douceur* for the waitress. The students having re-formed in line, the red-haired leader marched them back to Matt's in the circumspect manner that had characterised their outward journey.

At tea-time came another march out and home, and at seven the Welshman conducted his warriors to a restaurant, where, bearing in mind the fragile nature of the two previous meals, he ordered sixteen steaks, sixteen helps of two "veges," sixteen hunks of bread, sixteen tankards of bitter ale, sixteen portions of currant pudding, sixteen slices of cheese, sixteen pats of butter, and sixteen cups of coffee.

When they had consumed this homely but satisfying meal, the Welshman again collected the amount necessary to discharge the bill, with twopence extra per diner for the waiter. Then he once more marched his men back to Matt's, there to deliberate on further proceedings.

"Pity the Long 'Un isn't here," observed Mr Deadwood, in the midst of the discussion; "he was a fellow of great resource and suggestion. Where's he got to?"

"Jim," said the red-haired one, "is earning money for a man named Taplow, once of this hospital. That is the latest news of him, received in September last."

"I thank you," said Mr Deadwood, with as much dignity as his discoloured eyes and swollen nose rendered possible; "your reply, friend of the Orange Locks, is direct and lucid, but conveys little information. Speak further, Red Scalp, and put us on his trail!"

Mr Deadwood was addicted to the use of highly ornate language. He insulted everybody in terms that were clothed with plumage of a peculiarly offensive nature.

"Jim's new pitch is in Mount Street, Blackfriars," observed a student who had been blessed by nature with beetle brows and very irregular features.

"I thank you, Face," said Mr Deadwood, with simple courtesy.

The red-haired one moved that they should look Jim up. The motion being agreed upon, the party started off in twos and threes, the Welshman previously directing that Jim was not to be apprised of their visit until all had assembled outside Taplow's surgery.

It was not a very far cry to Mount Street. Arrived there, and perceiving a light in the surgery window, the Welshman turned the handle of the street door and walked in.

"Jim's out," he announced, appearing on the threshold a few moments later; "come on in."

They went in, and proceeded, while waiting for Jim, to amuse themselves in a naïve manner that was very upsetting to any compartment they chanced to favour with their attentions. In point of fact, they turned the surgery upside down, and were about to proceed with the still more disconcerting operation of putting it straight again, when a bearded gentleman appeared in the doorway and stared aghast at the confusion they had wrought.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded, furiously.

"Waiting for Jim," said the Welshman.

"What do you mean? Who are you?"

"Go away," said Mr Deadwood, playfully discharging the contents of a four-ounce syringe at the newcomer; "we don't want you to play with us!"

"Play with you! I'll have the police to you! I'll teach you to play here!" thundered the bearded man, turning on his heel and hastening down the street.

Jim's successor—for the bearded man was no less a personage—soon returned well backed up by several representatives of the law.

"Now, then, what's all this foolery? Clear out of here at once!" observed one of the latter, a stout sergeant.

The Welshman advanced. "We have come to see Dr Mortimer. You can't turn us out of here unless he wishes us to be turned out."

"Get out—all of you!" was the sergeant's abrupt rejoinder.

"Before we get out," said Mr Deadwood, "tell us what right this hairy-faced fellow has here, my excellent but somewhat overfed friend!"

"You'll find out what right he has here when you appear before the beak to-morrow!" spluttered the sergeant.

"Corpulent people should avoid excitement," put in Mr Deadwood.

The sergeant glared at him and went on: "This here surgery is Dr Taplow's, and this gentleman is in charge of it. You've come and broke up the wrong place, and so we must take you to the station—that is to say, if this gentleman wishes to charge you."

"Certainly," said the bearded man; "they have damaged the place, and must pay for it."

The students looked ruefully at each other.

"We thought this was Dr Mortimer's surgery," one of them said.

"Dr Mortimer's is farther down the street," said the sergeant, "so you've made a big mistake in playin' the fool here, and giving me cheek. You've got to come to the station, every man jack of you, and the quieter you come the better it will be for you in the morning."

Now the Welshman—acknowledged leader of the band—spoke up.

"Look here, bobby," he said, "we'll go to the station, but we're not going to be marched off like pickpockets. If you keep to the left-hand pavement, we'll keep to the right, and I'll give you my word of honour for the lot that we won't cut."

The Welshman had a good pair of eyes, and the stout sergeant was an old hand at summing up character at short notice. He conferred briefly with his men.

"Very well," he said, at length, "I'll agree to that. First give me your name and address, though."

The Welshman handed him his card. The sergeant made a sign, and the

police withdrew. Then the Welshman formed his men up in single file, gave the word to "March!" and led them in good order out of the surgery and down Mount Street, keeping them to the edge of the right-hand pavement. The sergeant, true to his compact, kept his men to the left-hand pavement, the bearded man walking sulkily by his side.

It is now necessary to return to Jim and his movements.

This had been a very hard day with the Long 'Un, who had been out and about constantly, for there was much sickness in the district. Some of Jim's frequent emergings were witnessed by young Isaac Harris, who, as often as his duties in the shop permitted it, took up a position on his step and watched the surgery door.

For, ever since Jim, before Rebecca Nathan's very eyes, had expelled Isaac from his surgery in the manner recently described, Isaac had been thirsting for revenge. And to-day an excellent idea had entered his head. The chief of the Hooligans still looked in at the Harris emporium for odd meals, and Isaac fancied that this nice gentleman would serve as a convenient instrument in the matter of harming Dr Mortimer. Isaac knew that the Hooligans bore Jim plenty of ill-will, and would be only too pleased to get an opportunity to wreak their spite against him. And it struck Isaac that their most favourable opportunity would occur at night-time, when Jim was attending a patient in one of the narrow courts in which the locality abounded.

The Hooligan leader had been in that afternoon, and Isaac had lost no time in sounding him about Jim. The Hooligan's sentiments and hopes were expressed in brief but blasphemous terms.

Now, Isaac knew what sort of metal Jim was composed of, and did not believe in his heart of hearts that the Hooligans would ever succeed in—as they elegantly put it—"outing" him; but he fancied they might be able to hustle him and do him some serious harm, and that, Isaac decided, would just suit *his* book. He did not want them to murder Jim, only hurt him.

That evening the Hooligan came in again and consumed a large meal which heartened him up considerably, and filled him with a savage desire to turn his hand against some of his fellow-beings. Kicking a policeman's skull in would have formed a most delectable dessert to his repast.

As he was leaving the shop in his usual truculent manner, he found Isaac lounging on the step.

"Good evening, sir," said Isaac, smoothly.

"Evening, guv'nor."

Isaac gazed at the other craftily. "Our dear doctor has been busy to-day,"

he murmured.

The Hooligan spat on the pavement.

"E's off again—just gone to Pine Court," added Isaac, carelessly.

An evil light glittered in the Hooligan's pig eyes. "Pine Court? 'Ow d'yer know?"

"Saw a kid from the court fetch him."

Half a dozen friends of the Hooligan's were standing idly about near a public-house close by. The Hooligan's glance fell on them. There was a shady little tavern not much farther away, where half a dozen more would certainly be "on call."

The Hooligan lit his short clay pipe, nodded to Isaac, and strolled away. Isaac saw the man approach his pals and enter into conversation with them. Then Isaac chuckled contentedly and went back to his work.

The case Jim had been called to was a serious one, and he was detained over an hour in the wretched room the Pine Court urchin had conducted him to. He drew a deep breath of relief when he at length quitted the loathsome sleeping-den and walked down the dirty stairs into the comparatively fresh air of the court below.

He was fumbling for his pipe, thinking to enjoy a smoke on his way back to the surgery, when a sight met his eyes which, for a moment, made his heart beat quickly. The narrow entrance to the court—whose opposite end was a cul de sac—was completely blocked up by a gang of louts. A glance showed him that their attitude was hostile to himself, and another quick glance round and about made manifest the disturbing and uncomfortable fact that he was absolutely cornered.

He knew, however, that it would be fatal to show the slightest fear or hesitation. They meant mischief, and although, to the best of his reckoning, they were twelve to his one, he saw he would have to go for the lot.

He walked quickly and resolutely forward. As he came up to the gang, the foremost of its members retired a few steps, for Jim's prowess was well known to them. All but one—a stalwart ruffian who stood his ground and leered up impudently at the young doctor.

"We've got yer this time," he said, exultingly.

For reply, Jim hit him, and as the man dropped to the ground with a howl of pain, a knife fell from his nerveless hand.

Instantly the rest threw themselves upon Jim. A blow from a knobbed stick crushed his hat in, and a belt-buckle, whizzing past his ear, cut right through his coat and nipped his shoulder. Simultaneously he was venomously kicked and struck on the body and legs. Still, no blow got really home, and Jim, warming to the fight, left a bruise every time either of his fists shot out. Several belts came swinging at his face; he dodged them, then seized one, wrenched it out of its

owner's hands, and lashed back at them with the cruel buckle.

He was nearer the entrance of the court now, and as he fought, edged still farther that way. Perceiving his design, the Hooligans massed themselves between their single opponent and the outlet, and such were their numbers that Jim had to retire towards the blind wall at the end of the court.

Step by step Jim was being forced back. If he were to make a rush into any of the houses he would be trapped still more surely. He was safer in the open. But when he reached the wall, and could retire no farther, the end must come, for the wall was unscalable, and he could not break his way through this pack of human wolves.

Still, Jim was lashing out as furiously as ever with the belt, and the curses of the Hooligans gave proof of the execution the heavy buckle wrought amongst them. His hat was off, his face was bleeding, his breath was coming in short, sharp gasps; they were all round him, hemming him in, and in a few seconds he must have been down, when of a sudden there was a great, boisterous cry, and Jim knew that help had come.

"Matt's! Matt's to the rescue! Hold up, Jim! Matts!"

This was the call as the sixteen men from Matt's, headed by the Welshman and Deadwood, came streaming into the court.

Unseen by the Hooligans, the small boy who had fetched Jim to his mother, witnessing Jim's perilous situation, had crept out of the court, and, encountering the students on their march down Mount Street, had, in a few breathless words, informed them of the "doctor's" plight. If it had been any other doctor they would have flown to the rescue, but they guessed it was Jim, and, directed by the urchin, made a frantic rush for Pine Court.

The Hooligans left Jim to face the new danger. The students and the Mount Street ruffians met with a crash, and there was a short, sharp *mêlée*.

But it was quite short. The Hooligans—under-sized wretches as many of them were—had no chance against the students, most of whom were athletes, and a few, like Deadwood, skilled fighters.

Jim's assailants were knocked down in all directions, and thrashed with their own belts. When they got up it was to make a dash for the entrance of the court, where they ran into the arms of the stout sergeant and his merrie men. Each policeman held tight to a Hooligan, and the students, pursuing hotly, captured others, but several got away.

Among the captured was the chief of the gang.

"This 'll mean five years for you, Jack Smith," said the stout sergeant, "and serve you right, you dirty scoundrel!"

Mr Smith's reply need not be recorded.

But among those who remained at large was the big brute Jim had felled

to the ground. This man, in falling, had sustained a severe scalp wound, and had crept out of the fight and up a dark staircase, where he lay until the police disappeared, writhing with pain and vowing eternal vengeance on Jim Mortimer.

CHAPTER XX. AFTER THE PLAY.

"Dear old man!" said the red-haired student, wringing Jim's hand. "I'm so glad we got here in time!"

The red-haired one then briefly recapitulated the events of the evening, and just as he concluded his story the stout sergeant touched him on the shoulder.

"My men have taken those rascals off to the station, sir," he said. "It's a good haul, and we couldn't have got 'em if you gentlemen hadn't helped. That being the case, I don't feel like taking you to the station as well. Couldn't you arrange matters, sir, with the gentleman at Dr Taplow's surgery?"

"Certainly, sergeant," said the red-haired one, who promptly approached the bearded man, Mr Deadwood following in his wake.

"I say, you know, sir," said the red-haired one to the bearded man, "if we've done any damage we shall be glad to make it good, don't you know. You don't wish to take further proceedings, do you?"

"It was a most unwarrantable intrusion," rejoined the bearded man, stiffly.

"I admit it," said the red-haired student.

"And we're sorry," added Mr Deadwood, "—beastly, awfully sorry."

Mr Deadwood accompanied this statement with a glance which was intended to indicate that if he (the bearded man) didn't accept the red-haired one's proposal, he (the bearded man) would get a jolly good punch in the nose from him (Mr Deadwood).

The bearded man evidently interpreted the glance thus, for he replied: "Very well, I will see what damage has been done, and send you the bill."

"Right O!" said the red-haired one. "My name's Evans Evans, of Matt's."

"Matt's!" cried the bearded man. "Why didn't you tell me that before? I'm a Matt's man!"

"You didn't look like a Matt's man, you see," explained Mr Deadwood in his nice way.

"But I am a Matt's man," said he of the beard, "so I won't send in any ac-

count.”

”Thanks. But if we’ve done any serious damage, we’ll pay for it. That’s only fair,” responded the Welshman.

Jim had joined the group. ”Well,” he said, ”I hope you’ll all come along to my place now and have some of the old poison.”

”We will,” said Mr Deadwood, with emphasis. ”Come on, old cock,” he added, linking his arm in the bearded man’s. ”I believe you’re not a bad sort, in spite of your looks.”

The bearded man wisely submitted to being led off in this way, and the rest followed, Jim bringing up the rear with the Welshman. The stout sergeant’s friendliness had not been forgotten, for he arrived at the police-station the wealthier by half-a-sovereign.

It was midnight before the students left Jim’s surgery, and by that time Jim and the bearded man were good friends, the latter having proved to be by no means a ”bad sort.” Mr Deadwood insisted on making a note of the bearded man’s natal day, as he said he would like to send him a birthday present. In parting, Mr Deadwood shook the bearded man warmly by the hand several times, wished him a merry, merry Christmas, and added that after all it was better to be healthy than handsome, and that he saw no reason why he (the bearded man) should not, therefore, be perfectly contented.

After this Mr Deadwood climbed into a cab and fell fast asleep. Edmund Mildmay got in after him, and said it would be all right, he would ”see Deady home—merry Christmas everybody!” So they drove off amid the wild hallooing of their fellow-students, who then chartered other cabs, and drove off too, leaving Jim and the bearded man saying very nice things to each other on the pavement. And so the evening ended in seasonable fashion.

Christmas came on apace. Down at Threeways, Christmas was always kept jovially, and Jim had been much in request everywhere. There were skating and hockey, theatricals and dancing, and Jim had been the central figure of all such activities and recreations. But, alas! Threeways was now forbidden land to him.

Late in the afternoon of Christmas Eve, Jim sat by his surgery fire smoking a solitary pipe. Paying Koko the twenty-five pounds had left him with very light pockets, but he had bought a few presents. No. 9 was now his home, so to speak, and he did not like to let Christmas pass without recognising the fact in some way. So, earlier in the afternoon, he had journeyed to Regent Street and wandered vaguely round a huge shop which seemed to contain nothing else but what one would like to buy. While waiting his turn, Mortimer found amusement in watching the crowd of purchasers. Here was a boy hungrily eyeing a huge model

yacht or torpedo boat; there a girl, wistfully calculating whether she could afford to give the price marked on the purse, or the letter-case, or the inkstand she knew mother would *love!* Here were two sisters, holding a whispered consultation; there a portly uncle, blandly making a big hole in a ten-pound note for little nephews and nieces.

Christmas has not gone from us, although some soured folk say that this sweet and holy season is not what it was. Christmas has certainly conformed itself to the times, like everything else, but Christmas will always be with us. Though there be no snow on the ground, no ice upon the ponds, yet it will always be Christmas in our hearts.

Jim was at length brought to bay by a good-looking dark girl in a neat black dress. There was a touch of Dora about her, and as she smiled in a friendly way upon the very tall customer, Jim told her just exactly what he wanted, and the dark girl's suggestions were so practical and tasteful that his presents subsequently proved great successes. For that voluble dame, Mrs Maybury, and her elder step-daughter, Miss H. R. Maybury, he bought neat little velvet handbags of the kind ladies carry when they take walks abroad; for Frank he got a huge knife, containing, among other wonders, an implement for extracting stones from horses' hoofs—no boy's knife, indeed, seems complete without this strange appendage, which is never by any chance used for the humane purpose it is intended for. For Dora, Jim bought a little writing-case made of light brown leather. Upon the corner he had an initial "D" affixed, in silver. This addition was expeditiously made while he waited. Jim knew that he must be very discreet in the kind of present he gave to Dora, so he chose something that looked quite simple, though, as a matter of fact, the little writing-case cost him more than the other three presents put together. The dark girl, with her quick instinct, seemed to read in Jim's eyes that this was a *very* special present, for Jim looked at eleven other writing-cases before he fixed on the brown one.

The presents were packed up at last, and Jim told the dark girl he was very much obliged to her, and that he was afraid he had given her a great deal of trouble. But the dark girl said that he hadn't given the slightest trouble, and hoped he would come there for his presents next Christmas, which Jim promised faithfully to do.

When he got back to his surgery he made up some medicine, and then sat down by the fire to smoke. And while he smoked he wondered whether his grandfather was thinking of him, and whether they would ever be re-united. Judging from his grandfather's stern silence, it seemed that he and the dear old home at Threeways were destined to be strangers for evermore.

Now it happened that the enterprising son of a Mount Street tradesman had taken a snapshot of Jim one sunny November afternoon, as the Long 'Un was

standing by his surgery door. The snapshot showed a good deal of the building as well as its occupier, and made a good picture. The youth had subsequently given Jim a mounted copy of the photo.

"I'll send the old man a Christmas card," said Jim, and straightway took the photo off his mantelpiece and wrote upon its back: "*The present quarters of your affectionate grandson, Jim. Wishing you a Happy Christmas.*"

He put his Mount Street address under this message, and on his way to No. 9, posted the photo to his grandfather.

Christmas Day dawned bright and frosty, and passed off far more pleasantly than Jim had anticipated. Those for whom Jim had bought presents were genuinely surprised and pleased by Jim's thoughtfulness. Mrs Maybury scrutinised Dora's face keenly as the girl opened the packet addressed to her in Jim's handwriting. But Dora simply thanked Jim as her sister had thanked him. She did not appear at all self-conscious, and so Mrs Maybury, who had begun of late to regard Jim and Dora with some suspicion, felt distinctly puzzled.

Frank was delighted with the knife, and for several days kept a sharp lookout for a limping horse that might require a stone removed from its hoof. But, as he afterwards told Jim, he didn't have any luck—probably because "nearly all the streets were made of beastly wood."

By the first post on Christmas morning there arrived for Dora a magnificent diamond brooch—Mr Jefferson's gift. At the same time Mr Jefferson reminded her that he would be calling about seven o'clock on Boxing Night to take her to the pantomime at Drury Lane.

At breakfast on Boxing Day Jim produced some yellow tickets. "There's a big show on for children in the Mount Street Church Room to-night," he said, "and I'm going to sing. Anyone care to come? It's a free show."

Mr Maybury quietly said that he would like a ticket, but nobody else accepted Jim's offer, so, as he had several tickets at his disposal, Jim gave one to Mary, and, later on, one to the old woman who looked after his surgery.

Mr Cleave and Miss Bird, it should be mentioned, were spending Christmas with relations—a fact which filled Jim with a feeling of devout thankfulness.

There was a very early dinner at No. 9 that evening, as Mrs Maybury, Miss "H.R.," and Frank were going to the pantomime at the Surrey Theatre. Punctually at seven, Mr Jefferson arrived and bore Dora, radiant and blushing, off to Drury Lane. The others went out about the same time, Mary trotting off to the Church Room in advance of Mr Maybury and Jim in order to secure a good seat.

So No. 9 remained locked up and tenantless until a quarter past eleven, when Mr Maybury arrived home.

The others trailed in half an hour later, Frank bursting with laughter over the antics and wheezes of the principal low comedian. Between twelve and one

Dora and Mr Jefferson came.

Dora, strangely silent, went to her room at once. Mr Jefferson, on the other hand, seemed much elated, and chatted gaily for some minutes before he took his departure.

Dora had not been in her room long before there came a little tap at her door, followed by the entrance of Mary.

"Oh, Miss, I'm sure you must be tired," said Mary; "may I help you?"

"If you like, Mary; yes, I am very tired."

Dora sighed as she sat down in front of her glass. Mary hastened to comb and brush her young mistress's hair. It was like old times to Dora, having her hair brushed by a maid—the old times when Mr Maybury was wealthy and held his head high in the commercial world. But now, alas! he was only a clerk in the office of the man who had taken Dora to the theatre that night! Her diamonds came from the man who paid her father a weekly wage!

"Oh, Miss, wasn't the pantomime *lovely*?"

"Yes, it was very nice," replied Dora, absent-mindedly. Then, rousing herself a little, she said: "And did you enjoy the concert, Mary?"

"Oh, Miss Dora, it was grand! And so was the doctor, Miss!"

"Did he sing well?"

"*Sing!* I should think he did! You should 'ave 'eard 'em larf! They wouldn't let 'im leave off. They clapped and 'oorayed every time—them children—till I thought they'd never stop. Funny ain't the word. I very nearly split in 'arf, Miss! There was five hundred children, and 'eaps of other folk, and the vicar and 'is curates, and their lady friends—and they larfed as much as the children did, Miss. And right at the end 'e sang a little song—to finish with—which was funny at first, and then made you feel you'd like to cry. And the kiddies kept quite quiet in that part—they seemed to understand, Miss. And when he'd done, Miss, he bowed to all the children just as if they were lords and ladies, and it was real pretty to see the little girls kiss their hands to 'im, and the doctor kiss his hand back to them! Everybody enjoyed it, and them kids went 'ome as 'appy as if they'd each found a shillin'."

Mary dilated on the concert at great length, but she went off at last, and Dora was still sitting thoughtfully before the glass when there came yet another knock at her door.

She rose from her chair and went to see who it was. "May I come in a moment, dear?"

It was Mr Maybury. "I wanted to hear how you enjoyed the pantomime."

For reply, Dora flung her arms round her father's neck and burst into tears.

"Why, Dora, dear—what is the matter?"

But Dora still sobbed upon his shoulder.

"Is it anything to do with Mr Jefferson, dearest?"

"Yes," said Dora.

"You have not quarrelled, I hope?"

Dora lifted her head and looked bravely into her father's eyes.

"No, we haven't quarrelled, father dear. On the way home he asked me to marry him within a month from now."

"And you said?"

"And I promised that I would, father."

CHAPTER XXI. A MATTER OF WAGES.

After this declaration, Dora's father, knowing something of the nature of women, expected a fresh outburst of tears. But none came. Dora turned towards her glass, and a moment later wheeled round with a smile upon her face.

"And so, you see, dear," she said, "you must make the most of me, while you have me. It does seem a short time, doesn't it—a month—such a very little time for us to be together!"

Mr Maybury took the girl's soft hand in his and looked thoughtfully into her face. For this news came as a sudden shock to him. He had not anticipated parting with her for at least a twelve-month—or perhaps more—from the day of her betrothal to Harold Jefferson.

Dora and he had been very firm friends from the earliest days, and since his commercial downfall this bond between the two had increased tenfold. For, when Mr Maybury was rich, Dora had been a queen-in-little, very imperious, exacting, impetuous, and possibly somewhat selfish. But ever she had been her father's most treasured possession, and he had loved to see her in dainty dresses, and surrounded by those pretty things which his wealth had enabled him to buy for her in abundance. So devoted was he to the child, indeed, that when he married for the second time, his new wife had exhibited no little jealousy on Dora's account.

Then came the crash—when Dora was a schoolgirl—and then, when the elder Miss Maybury and Mrs Maybury uttered lamentations for their altered estate, and even went so far as to upbraid Mr Maybury for his short-sighted business policy, Dora's arms closed about his neck, her lips sought his haggard face, and

Dora's voice, with words of love and affection, acted like healing balm upon his sore heart.

"Yes," he said at length, "it does seem a little time—a month!"

He sighed—and Dora's eyes filled with tears she would not let fall, so that she saw him as through a mist, dimly.

"Oh, father," she said, laying her head upon his shoulder, "it does seem dreadful to have to leave you, but I shall come to see you very often—very, *very* often!"

"Yes, yes, dear," he said, "you will come and see me. I must not be selfish. I cannot expect to keep you by my side all my life. It is the same with most fathers. Their sons seek wives, their daughters are taken from them, and they are left alone."

"Poor father," said Dora, gently, as she kissed him.

Mr Maybury sat down, and Dora placed herself on his knees, as had been her custom from babyhood, with one round arm encircling his neck.

In those early days Dora may have sadly plagued her nurse or governess, but with her father she had always been docile, serving him with a demure obedience that had been very sweet to see. As a child, her storms of tears would be replaced of a sudden by sunny smiles when she heard his voice or noticed his approaching form. Their mutual love was a talisman which chased away her frowns and pouts, and changed her, upon his entrance, into a totally different creature, her nurse or governess wondering greatly the while. And so, though of a naturally wilful disposition, Dora would often strive to conquer the rebellious mood when she felt it coming upon her, simply that she might please her father.

Tender recollections had both now of the strolls they used to take through the fields which surrounded their old home, which stood far enough outside Manchester to be free from the smoke of the factories. Mr Maybury revelled in the peace of the meadowland after the din of the city in whose midst he earned his money, and Dora, though she loved to romp with other girls, and to go to theatres and concerts and parties, preferred these quiet walks to anything else—the walks which came to an end when she was just merging into womanhood. And now they lived in a poor crescent, and one had to go by train to reach woods and green fields. On Sunday evenings now the clang of many bells came to their ears above the ceaseless hum of toiling omnibuses and trams, and the badinage of Londoners promenading—so sadly different was it all to the excursions of olden times, her little hand in his big one, the grave father's voice mingling with her childish tones.

Picture after picture presented itself to their minds in phantasmal fashion. There was the cool old church where they sat side by side in a roomy, ancient pew, Dora nestling close to her father and watching the preacher with wondering

big eyes. Then there was the pleasant after-service talk with their neighbours, and finally the walk home along the leafy lanes, with Nature's winged choristers chanting songs of the holy day, and all sorts of tiny hedge-people buzzing and laughing in the sunshine.

"Father, you look so sad!" said Dora. "But there is still a month, and we must make the most of that—you and I! We will go to the theatre together—so as to be quite by ourselves—and sit in the pit and enjoy ourselves tremendously. It will be such a change, after stalls and boxes! I don't suppose I shall ever sit in the pit after I am married."

It seemed to Mr Maybury that her voice lost its gay ring as she uttered these concluding words, but it never occurred to him to ask her whether she was quite sure that she loved the man she was going to marry. He took it for granted that she did.

They chatted on together until a clock near at hand tolled out "One." Then Mr Maybury said it was time they both went to bed.

He kissed her tenderly on the forehead, and then she held the light so that he might see his way down to the next landing. "Good-night, dear!" she said; and he, glancing upwards, thought he had never beheld so fair a picture as she made standing there in the dark doorway.

[image]

"GOOD-NIGHT!"

And thus they parted—he to rest, she to think. For, long after the house was hushed in slumber, Dora paced up and down her little bedroom. Often she paused in front of her glass and communed with the white-faced reflection that gazed back at her.

On their way home from the theatre, Harold Jefferson had told her that he intended to use all his influence to procure her father a more remunerative position at the office.

"And then," said Dora, at length, to the face in the glass, "father will be comfortably off all his life. That is everything!"

With a little shiver she blew out her candle and crept into bed. For long she lay sleepless, but presently a compassionate angel, in the course of her flight over the Dark City, entered the little room, and, touching the girl's eyelids with her cool finger-tips, led her away to Dreamland.

Harold Jefferson was as good as his word, for, shortly before lunch time on the following day, Mr Maybury was informed that the head of the firm wished to see him in his private room. Mr Maybury at once obeyed the summons, concluding that it must have something to do with his daughter's engagement to Harold. Possibly the elder Jefferson objected to the match, and a curious feeling of elation took possession of Mr Maybury as it occurred to him that this might be the case.

Mr Jefferson was a stout, rather apoplectic-looking man of some sixty years—quite unlike his son in appearance. There was nothing of the keen, lean stockbroker about him; indeed, his ponderous manner and measured speech reminded one of an old-fashioned type of merchant that is now almost extinct.

"Ha! sit down, Mr Maybury. A pleasant change after the muggy weather we have been experiencing lately! Ahem! yes, I wanted to see you on a little matter—quite a little matter—ahem! You have been with us now—"

"Three years, sir," said the other quietly.

"Three years? So long! Well, well—time flies, time flies. But to business. I—er—I have—er—asked my manager, Mr Jacobs, to recommend such persons in—er—in my employ as he considers deserving of an increase in salary. The new year is close at hand, and it appears to me an—er—an appropriate season for such—er—recommendations. Your name, Mr Maybury, comes first on the list. I am assured that you are most punctilious in—er—in the discharge of your duties, and that you are a man to be implicitly trusted in all respects. I gather, in short, that you are in all respects a most satisfactory servant of the—er—firm. I have decided, therefore, to make a substantial addition to your present salary. You are now paid—er—you receive—"

"One hundred and fifty pounds a year, sir."

"One hundred and fifty? Well, well,—that is hardly adequate remuneration for a man of your integrity and ability. A good man is—er—is worth good pay. I shall have much pleasure, therefore, Mr Maybury, in raising your salary to—er—three hundred pounds a year."

Three hundred a year! The amount had a refreshing, satisfying sound! It would mean a very different state of things at No. 9, would three hundred a year.

"I am deeply grateful to you, sir—" began Mr Maybury.

"Don't mention it. You deserve it. Your increase of salary will commence on New Year's Day. And now, Mr Maybury, we will turn to another topic. There has for some time been a little affair—a little love-making—between two young people we both know very well. I have known, of course, that my son Harold was paying attentions to your daughter; he has spoken of her—in fact, he has shown me her photograph. She is, if I may say so, a very charming young lady, and I hope to have the—er—pleasure of making her acquaintance quite shortly. In fact, I trust that Mrs Maybury and yourself will bring Miss—er—Flora—"

"Dora," corrected Mr Maybury, with a slight smile.

"Dora! Pardon my mistake! Yes, I trust you will all three come and dine with Harold and myself at an early date. I—er—I had no idea that Harold contemplated matrimony—ahem!—quite so soon, but I shall be glad to see him settle down, as he has hitherto been a little restless—a little—ahem!—a little irregular in his habits. So I am not displeased at this—er—this approaching union."

"I am glad to hear that it meets with your approval, sir."

Mr Jefferson drummed thoughtfully on the table with his fingers. For a long time he had been dissatisfied with his son's conduct, and the news of the latter's matrimonial intentions had come as an immense relief to the worried parent.

"I do not think I need keep you any longer, Mr Maybury," said the stockbroker, at length; "er—we shall no doubt see a little more of each other in—er—in future."

Mr Maybury rose from his chair with a curiously determined look on his face. He had fully made up his mind on a certain matter that had dawned upon him during the latter part of this short interview.

"I wish to ask you one question, sir," he said, "before I definitely accept your proffered increase of salary."

"Certainly, certainly," said the other. "What is it?"

"I wish to ask you, as man to man, and not as servant to employer, whether your son's forthcoming marriage with my daughter has anything to do with your proposed doubling of my salary?"

The stockbroker frowned. "That, Mr Maybury," he replied, "is entirely my business. It is sufficient for you to know that I have decided to enlarge your stipend by the amount I have named."

"I wish you to answer my question, sir," said Mr Maybury, firmly.

"And I decline to answer it," returned the other, his previously urbane manner vanishing as he spoke.

"Then, sir, I shall take it that I am correct in my assumption—that you are making this increase solely because you wish me to occupy a better position in the world than my present salary enables me to hold."

"And supposing it *were* that?" demanded the stockbroker, roughly. "Do you mean to say you will refuse such an offer?"

"I do, sir. I absolutely decline this increase of salary. I will take what I earn, and not a penny more."

So saying, with a slight bow, Mr Maybury turned on his heel and left the room.

The stockbroker sat for some time in a state of amazement. At length he spoke.

"I could not have imagined—I would not have believed—that the City of

London contained such a fool. Here is a man, as poor as a rat, actually throwing away a hundred and fifty a year! He must be mad!"

Mr Maybury breathed not a word at home of his interview with Mr Jefferson the elder. As for Harold, when he was informed by his father of the result of the conversation, he too marvelled greatly.

But he did not think it necessary to mention the upshot of the interview to Dora.

CHAPTER XXII. THE WARNING.

On the same morning, at breakfast, Miss H. R. Maybury informed Jim that her sister was to be married to Harold Jefferson at the end of January.

Miss Maybury kept a careful watch on Jim's face while she imparted this piece of news, for she, like her stepmother, had for some time suspected the young doctor of not being entirely indifferent to Dora. Of the latter's attitude towards Dr Mortimer Miss H. R. Maybury was in a state of aggravating doubt. She had a shrewd idea that Dora, on her part, was not insensible to such charms as Jim might possess, but she was not sure about it. She had quite unsuccessfully endeavoured to "draw" Dora on the subject, but Dora had listened to H. R.'s references to Jim with a blank countenance that told no tales and gave nothing away.

On this occasion Jim was taken quite by surprise, and his face yielded up his secret. H. R., warily observing his expression, saw that she had been correct in her surmise. Dr Mortimer *was* in love with her sister!

"Indeed!" said Jim confusedly. "Rather soon, isn't it?"

"Yes, it has been a very short engagement," returned H. R.—"in fact, I don't think myself that Dora ought to be married until she's at least twenty—she is so *very* young for her age! What do you think?"

"It has never struck me that she was," replied Jim, beginning to regain his self-possession.

"She is still a child in her thoughts," Miss Maybury declared.

Jim, framing his opinion on the events of a certain walk Dora and he had taken in the Crescent one night, thought otherwise, but thought it quite to himself.

"However," continued Miss Maybury, "it appears that Mr Jefferson has been advised by Dr Taplow to go abroad for a few months—until the worst of the winter is over."

"He looks delicate," said Jim, grimly.

"Yes, I'm afraid his chest is not too strong. Well, as I was saying, he has got to go abroad, and, as he can't bear to leave Dora all that time, he thinks that the best plan will be for them to get married at once."

Jim wondered whether Mr Jefferson's delicate chest was his sole reason for hurrying on the marriage.

"And so now," concluded Miss Maybury, "it will be all bustle and milliners until the important day, and I am afraid you poor men will be made rather uncomfortable."

"Oh, you mustn't mind us," said Jim, good-humouredly; "we can have our meals on the stairs, if you like."

And so, with a laugh, Jim got on to his long legs and departed to his surgery, leaving Miss Maybury wondering more than ever whether Dora had given him any secret encouragement.

Jim whistled in a melancholy, stolid way as he walked along Blackfriars Road to his work. So Dora Maybury was to be married in a month. One month! And that would be the end of the little romance which had started in a tea-shop at mid-summer, when he, Jim, first saw a face which had haunted him ever since.

Dora was to be married in a month's time, and the face would vanish, and he didn't suppose he would ever care about another girl all his life long.

"For if I live to a hundred," thought Jim, still staunch to his lady-love, "I shall never meet such an angel again. Henceforth, J. Mortimer, you've got to settle down to a bachelor existence. It's Dora or nobody, and, as it can't be Dora, it must be nobody."

It was lucky for Jim that he found heaps of work awaiting him in the shape of a long queue of humble patients, for he had no time to brood over his sorrows. He had to anoint unsavoury sores and bind up ugly wounds; he had to listen to long tales of neuralgias, sleepless nights, cramps, and the *olla podrida* of small woes to which our human flesh is heir—and heiress. It was chiefly heiress, as we have before remarked, at the Mount Street surgery. And Jim, of course, had to listen very carefully, for sometimes he found himself face to face with a malignant disease—something that called for prompt and accurate diagnosis. Love and lovers' thoughts must be driven into the background when a doctor finds himself gazing on a waxen-faced morsel of humanity which, unbeknown to its mother, has the seeds of diphtheria apparent in its wee throat—and such cases were presented to Jim in plenty. The dire complaints which came into Jim's surgery seemed to be shed upon him by a beneficent Providence, for they

brought out the man and the surgeon, and bade the love-sick swain forget his own woes in the bodily ills of his fellow-creatures.

After the visiting patients had been dealt with, Jim went out upon his rounds. He returned to his surgery about tea-time, and had not been long back when the Chinaman adorning the mantelpiece was precipitated on to his face, and a sound of shuffling steps proceeded from the waiting-room.

"Come in!" bawled Jim, who was reading an evening paper by the fire. "Old Harris, I'll bet a dollar," he added to himself.

He had guessed aright. Mr Harris it was, but this time his disorder was something more substantial than a feeling as if his hair were being brushed. In point of fact, the face of the junior partner in the firm of Harris & Father was decorated with scratches.

The old man sank into a chair.

"I've come over for a box of ointment, doctor. You see these marks on my face?"

"They're pretty visible," said Jim.

"*Rebecca!*" explained the old man, in a hollow voice.

"Miss Nathan?"

"Yes, that was the party vot done it."

"Showing her affection for her future father-in-law rather early in the day?" ventured Jim.

"*Father-in-law?*—not me! She'll never marry that velp Isaac. She's about finished vith '*im!*'"

"That's good news," said Jim. "Who's the new young man?"

"Vy," said the provision dealer, "I'm thinkin' she'll be after *you* next, doctor!"

"*Me!*" said Jim, looking so amazed that the old Jew was seized with a most unpleasant spasm of mirth.

"Yes, ever since you chucked Isaac out that night," he explained, "she's referred to you in an admirin' vay vich turns Isaac simply yellor. Yes, I told you she'd marry a gentleman, and you're 'er choice, my dear sir!"

And again the old man's throat gave out a croaking wheeze which, by a lurid effort of the imagination, might be described as laughter.

"So you will understand," added Mr Harris, "that Isaac don't love yer. In fact, I believe 'e set those 'Ooligans on yer in Pine Court."

"You think that?" inquired Jim, sharply.

"It's a bad thing to say of one's own flesh an' blood," returned Mr Harris, "but I think 'e did. I want to *varn* yer, doctor; keep yer eye open, for them ruffians ain't done vith yer yet—nor 'as Isaac."

"You imagine they'll have another go at me?" said Jim.

"I do," said the old man, "and next time they'll make dead sure of yer.

They're not men—they're wolves. They never forgive. That's their natur'—and Isaac's."

Jim pulled at his pipe thoughtfully. He felt that the old Jew, despite Isaac's unfilial conduct, would not have denounced his own son in this way if there had not been serious reasons for his so doing.

"I'll remember your warning, Mr Harris," he said at length; "and now," he added, "let me see what I can do for you. Stand here by the gas, will you?"

The old man obeyed.

"She went for you pretty hard," remarked Jim, proceeding to mix up some healing ointment for his patient; "how did it happen?"

"Like this," said Mr Harris. "Last night Isaac and I vos invited to spend the evenin' at the Nathans. On'y she and 'er brother vos there—the old 'uns vos out. 'Er brother is a big loud feller, and despises Isaac. Vell, ve set down to cards—'Uncle Sam' vos the game—"

"A tricky one, too," put in Jim.

"So ve found," added the provision dealer, "for Rebecca, she von nearly ev'ry pool. After a bit I votched 'er close, and found some of the cards vos marked. So I says: 'Rebecca,' I says, 'you ain't playin' fair,' I says. 'Vot!' she cries, colourin' up. 'Vy,' I says, 'you're cheatin', my dear!' Yes, I said that—to 'er face—and she up and let me 'ave 'er nails—all ten of 'em—down my face, an' 'er brother 'e says if I vosn't an old man 'e'd throw me out of the 'ouse. Yes, 'e said that. And I says, 'Isaac,' I says, 'vill you see your old fader used in this vay, without raisin' a 'and to 'elp 'im?' But Isaac was turnin' green an' pink, and didn't dare say nothink, so ven I'd got out of Rebecca's clutches I ups vith my glass of gin-and-vater an' lets Rebecca's brother 'ave it full in the face, an' then I gets 'old of the poker an' I says: 'Touch me,' I says, 'an' I'll rap you over the skull,' I says. Yes, like that! And he daren't put a finger on me, so I gets my 'at an' off I goes, and if they've got my money I've got their poker—yes, and I'll keep it, too—yes, and that's vot 'appened, doctor dear."

[image]

"TOUCH ME," I SAYS, "AN' I'LL RAP YOU OVER THE SKULL," I SAYS

"Bravo!" said Jim, who had listened to this improving story with all possible interest. "You're quite a scrapper, Mr Harris."

But the old man, whose eyes had burnt fiercely during his recital of the incident, sat down with a sigh.

"But it's worse than ever at 'ome, now," he said. "Isaac, 'e's like a vild beast. 'E sees vot Rebecca is, and yet 'e's mad after 'er still. Yes, that's 'is state."

It was hardly to be supposed that Jim would evince any sympathy for the young Jew, knowing, as he did, that Isaac had put the Hooligans on his track in Pine Court that night. But Jim felt for the old dealer.

"Now, look here, Mr Harris," he said, "if you pull up and play the man you can get that business back, and be your own master again."

But the dealer shook his head. A reaction had followed his animated account of the card-party, and he seemed to have shrunk into a smaller and older man than he really was.

He took the ointment Jim handed to him and put on his hat. His grey locks were unkempt, his clothes shabby and unbrushed, his eyes dim. He presented, indeed, a pathetic spectacle. Bidding Jim good evening, the old Jew, with bowed shoulders, crept out of the surgery, and trudged away through the December drizzle to resume his joyless tasks at the provision shop.

For some time Jim sat by his fire thinking over the words of warning Mr Harris had uttered. Next time, the provision dealer had said, the Hooligans would make sure of him.

Of a sudden, a pebble crashed through the waiting-room window. Jim started to his feet, hurried into the passage, and threw open the front door. Mount Street was the picture of desolation; a light, clammy rain was descending steadily, and the pavements were deserted. One figure, however, was plainly visible by the lamp-post on the opposite pavement—that of a man with his head bound up.

In a flash Jim recognised him as one of the gang that had assaulted him in Pine Court—this was the man, indeed, whom he had knocked down early in the proceedings.

Instantly on making this discovery Jim strode across the road. As quickly the man vanished down an alley. Jim, reaching the entrance to the alley, hesitated. Might not this fellow be acting as a decoy?

Jim had learnt prudence. Slowly he turned on his heel and went back to the surgery. Closing the street door, he resumed his chair by the fire, and in a narrow street just off the alley a group of Hooligans, baffled again, uttered curses of disappointment as they slowly dispersed about their bad business.

CHAPTER XXIII. THE IVORY FAN.

"In my opinion," quoth Miss Bird, looking up from her embroidery (she was making Dora a table-centre for a wedding present), "girls have too many dresses. When I was your age, my dear, I had two dresses—one for everyday and the other for Sundays. They were both black. In those days girls were taught to be contented with a few clothes, and to make them last a *very* long time!"

"How long did you have to make your best dress last?" asked Dora.

"Five years," said Miss Bird.

"Just fancy!" cried Dora. "Why, it must have been *green* by that time."

"It *was* green," acknowledged Miss Bird, with a hard smile.

"And you still wore it?"

"Of course I wore it! I had no other."

"But you must have *hated* wearing it!"

"I *did* hate wearing it," said Miss Bird; "I loathed the sight of it. I could have torn it to pieces. But it was my only good dress, and so I kept it in constant repair, and cleaned it, and brushed it, and put it away very carefully every Sunday night or after a party. Ah! young girls had a very different time of it forty years ago, I can tell you, my dear!"

Dora gazed at Miss Bird in some surprise. The severe-looking maiden lady seldom spoke so feelingly. Yet, of late, she had talked to Dora a good deal. Dora had given up her situation at the post-office—by Harold Jefferson's express desire—and so was at home all day now. Consequently, she and Miss Bird saw much of each other, and a kind of little friendliness had grown up between them which had never existed previously. In fact, before this cold, wet January set in, Miss Bird had seemed to entertain a feeling of dislike for Dora.

"No," recommended Miss Bird, who probably felt that she had shown a little too much of her human side, "in those days girls didn't gad about on bicycles and scamper after footballs and cricket balls like so many boys. Nor did they go to the theatre alone with young men. No, in my young days I wasn't even allowed to look out of the window at people passing along the pavement. I was fined a shilling if I did. You may not believe that, but it's true! I was brought up very strictly by an aunt in a country village, and I don't suppose anybody on this earth—except a convict in prison, who deserves all he gets, the rascal!—ever passed such a monotonous existence as I did."

"How long did you live with your aunt?" asked Dora, rather timidly.

"Until I was thirty," replied Miss Bird, "and then she died and left me just enough to live on. And I've been living on that just enough ever since."

Miss Bird's customary conversation consisted of harsh comments on current events or severe criticisms of internal affairs at No. 9. She had never been so communicative regarding her past life before.

Dora employed herself with her sewing for a time, and then observed: "I

am afraid you cannot have been very happy as a girl, Miss Bird. Did—did you ever see any young men?”

Miss Bird uttered a grating, unmusical laugh. “I saw the backs of a few in church.”

“Was that all?”

“And occasionally talked to a curate at a croquet party.”

“How *dreadful!*” cried Dora.

“My aunt,” explained Miss Bird, “hated men! She was jilted as a girl, and detested men ever afterwards. So I never spoke to any men—except curates. No man ever said a tender word to me—no man ever lent me a book or wrote a poem to me, or presented me with a bunch of flowers. That was my girlhood—and now, perhaps, you won’t be so surprised at my being a cross old woman!”

Dora, with a sweet impulse, dropped her sewing, and, putting her arms round the elderly lady’s neck, kissed her on the cheek.

“I am so sorry you were unhappy,” she said, gently.

The grimness faded out of Miss Bird’s face. She laid down her embroidery and took Dora’s hand.

“My dear,” she said, “that is all over and gone. Still, I shall not forget what you said. Some day you may want a friend—a woman—and then you mustn’t be afraid to come to me. My bark, child, is worse than my bite.... There! now we mustn’t be sentimental any longer, but get on with our work.”

Dora therefore relapsed once more into her seat by Miss Bird’s side and resumed her sewing, and for some time the silence was unbroken save by the sound of stitching.

“When is the wedding, child?” asked Miss Bird, suddenly.

“On the 26th,” said Dora, bending rather more closely over her work.

Miss Bird submitted the girl’s profile to a severe scrutiny. “Personally,” she said at length, “I don’t like the man.”

“Who?” said Dora.

“Jefferson.”

“But,” Dora hastened to retort, “you were in favour of my being engaged to him.”

“I know more of him now,” said the old maid, “and in my opinion that young doctor’s worth ten of him.”

Dora started, and her needle went into her finger.

“You pricked yourself then,” jeered Miss Bird.

Dora said nothing.

“Because I mentioned *him!*”

“What *do* you mean, Miss Bird?” demanded Dora, with cheeks afire.

Before Miss Bird could reply, however, the door opened and Mr Cleave

appeared.

"I hope—er—I hope I am not interrupting you," said the newcomer, with a slight cough; "that is to say, you may be discussing some matter of dress—ahem!—trust I am not *de trop*?"

"That's exactly what you *are*!" roared Miss Bird.

"Oh—er—ahem!—in that case I will retire—"

"If you please!" replied Miss Bird, sternly.

"Oh, Mr Cleave, of *course* you may come in!" cried Dora, rising to her feet.

"In fact, I was just going out—"

"That's a fib!" said Miss Bird.

But Dora had flown. "Well, come in, come in," said Miss Bird; "come in and read your wretched little paper—"

"Pardon?" inquired Cleave.

"Your *paper*!" howled Miss Bird; "your wretched little rag of a paper that squeals like a pig when anybody has a glass of beer."

"I—er—think—I—er—I think I will *not* come in just now," bleated Cleave, retreating precipitately.

"Bah!" muttered Miss Bird, "everything's upside down. That man ought to be in skirts, and Mortimer ought to be *shot* for not eloping with Dora!"

And so the preparations for the wedding continued apace. Of course, economy had to be studied, wherefore Mrs Maybury hired an industrious seamstress to come and sew every day; and sew the seamstress did, till her fingers ached. Miss Bird sat by and threw out hints; H. R. snapped at Miss Bird, and Mrs Maybury snapped at H. R. Finally, the two latter would snap at Dora, who, after firing up at them, would retire to her bedroom, presently descending softly to sit in the drawing-room, the others being in possession of the dining-room.

So passed this damp January time, and the wedding day drew nearer and nearer. Occasionally Mr Jefferson appeared, very dapper and smiling, in evening dress, and carried Dora off to a theatre. But after these excursions, Dora would be very silent, and slip off to her bedroom at the first possible moment.

Mr Maybury and Dora had a quiet evening together at the theatre. They went to see a comedy—a piece in which laughter and tears trod upon one another's heels—a good little piece whose like is not often seen on London boards. They sat hand-in-hand, as in the old days, this father and daughter, and when it was all over, and they came out into the street, their faces were sad. For they were to part soon—so soon.

One day Koko met Jim, by appointment, at Charing Cross, and they both set off for Regent Street to buy Dora a wedding present.

"I know a shop," said Jim; "bought some things there at Christmas."

"Oh yes," said Koko, "you told me. Very nice dark girl there, eh?"

"I forget," said Jim, indifferently; "I daresay there is. Most of the girls in these shops are dark."

"I recollect you mentioned this one to me particularly," said Koko.

"Did I?" replied Jim. "Well, I daresay I did. Anyhow, I haven't the faintest idea what I'm going to get. Been thinking about it for three weeks, too."

"Personally," said Koko, "I am going to buy her a work-box."

"A *what?*"

"A work-box—full of pins and needles and tapes, and all that sort of thing."

"I thought ladies used work-*baskets*," hazarded Jim, vaguely.

"Boxes," said Koko.

"*Baskets*," insisted Jim; "work-*boxes* are a trifle obsolete, I believe."

"Obsolete or not obsolete," said Koko, "I shall get her a work-*box*."

"All right," returned Jim; "I don't care."

Koko stole a glance at Jim as they walked up Waterloo Place. He had noticed, of late, that Jim was looking unusually gaunt and thin. Koko felt very sorry for his friend, for, in spite of the Long 'Un's lively manner, Koko saw that his old chum was quite a different man now to the jaunty youth who had been the life and soul of Matt's.

"I must get him away for a holiday," thought Koko, in his quiet way; "this business has knocked him over a bit."

They stood for some time outside the shop staring at the array of presents in the window. Koko was staunch to his work-box, but Jim, after gazing into the window for five minutes, was still quite undecided. At length he declared he would leave it to the dark girl.

[image]

JIM WAS STILL QUITE UNDECIDED.

Koko walked in first, and, espying the dark girl, approached her part of the counter. Very soon a dozen work-boxes lay before him, and he was not long in making up his mind about one. Then, true to his programme, he had it well stocked with everything that Dora could possibly require—even down to a box of matches.

"You never know when you won't want matches," he explained to Jim.

"Well," said Jim, brusquely, "you've got your work-box. Now what about me?"

"Go ahead," said Koko; "there are about twenty thousand things to choose from in this shop."

"A present for a lady?" queried the dark girl.

"Yes," said Jim; "a wedding present."

"I know the very thing," she said, and took down from a shelf near by an ivory fan with forget-me-nots painted by hand upon it.

"Yes, very pretty," agreed Jim; "but—er—I should prefer some other kind of flower."

The dark girl fancied she understood.

"I have another ivory fan that is just as pretty as this one. I will get it."

The fan was brought. Upon the pure ivory was painted a little sprig of rosemary.

"That's for remembrance," quoted Koko, softly.

And so Jim chose the ivory fan as a wedding present for Dora.

CHAPTER XXIV. JIM CATCHES A TRAIN.

When old Dr Mortimer received Jim's Christmas card, his face hardened into stone, and his first impulse was to throw the little photograph into the fire. After Jim's final and crowning sin, the Doctor had decided that he would have nothing more to do with his grandson, whose hospital career had been one long escapade, punctuated, at rare intervals, with fits of steady reading.

Jim owed his qualification to his natural genius rather than to these bursts of study. A certain amount of book-work he had been obliged to do, and he did it. Practical work he had revelled in, for action suited his mercurial, restless disposition, and his practical work had saved him. He was by head and shoulders the finest operator Matt's had turned out for many a year, and the examining board knew it.

Throughout his student's career he had been by turns the pride and despair of his grandfather. Dr Mortimer had sent him angry letters when he was in town, and delivered stern reproofs when he came down to Threeways. Jim had promised reformation, only to fall away from the narrow path of rectitude at the first opportunity that presented itself. At last came the paragraph in the local paper anent Jim's doings at the Exhibition, and this had used up the last scrap

of his grandfather's patience. Everybody read the paragraph, and everybody laughed at it. Overcome with rage, the Doctor had sat down at his desk and penned the letter which changed the whole course of Jim's existence.

So the old doctor put Jim out of his life—thrust him forth to get his bread—or starve. But he could not put his grandson out of his heart, and, as he sat by his lonely fireside during the following weeks and months, his thoughts had often wandered to the wayward lad, and he had often wondered how Jim was faring—had wondered even, indeed, whether he were alive or dead.

The photograph of his surgery which Jim sent to his grandfather served to allay the old man's misgivings. He had fancied at one time that Jim had gone clean to the bad, and that Sir Savile and other old friends who knew both grandfather and grandson were loth to inform him of the lad's downfall. But it appeared from the photograph—and the particulars on the back of it—that Jim was earning his living. His practice did not appear to embrace an aristocratic quarter, but that did not matter very much. Jim was working, and probably amassing much useful experience.

The old doctor felt relieved. His first impulse—to tear up the little picture—soon departed. He turned Jim's card over several times, and finally, wondering somewhat at his unusual weakness propped it up against one of the massive bronze candlesticks which stood upon his dining-room mantelpiece. It was the only card Dr Mortimer received, and it looked curiously small and forlorn stuck up on that spacious, dignified mantelpiece all by itself.

There, however, the Doctor put it, and there it stayed. The servants examined it and read the message it bore on its little back, and so they too came to learn where "Mr James" was, as did Hughes and the other attendants over at the asylum, not to mention the gardeners, the coachman, and the stable hands. So the kitchen drank a bumper on Christmas night; the butler gave the toast "Mr James—his health!" and with right honest warmth was it drunk. "Bless his handsome face and kind heart!" added the cook, wiping her motherly eyes—and thus Jim, knowing nothing of it, was remembered.

And it is just possible that the proud old man in the dining-room drank a silent toast to the lad he had expelled—without acknowledging to himself that he did so.

Christmas passed away, and January was drawing to a close, when not only the county of Eastfolk but the whole country was distressed by news to the effect that Lord Lingfield, the eminent statesman—one of the few prominent politicians of the day reputed to speak and vote according to the dictates of conscience—had been laid low by a dangerous and distressing internal malady. The illness had been threatening for some months; indeed, it had first manifested itself on the day when Lady Lingfield, having driven over to consult Dr Mortimer, encountered

Jim in the act of crossing the high road in his dressing-gown.

Since that day old Dr Mortimer had paid frequent visits to his distinguished patient, who had at first made light of his complaint, and who did not really realise that his life was in jeopardy until a sudden change in the weather gave him a chill and brought matters to a head. A provincial specialist had been summoned to consult with Dr Mortimer, and Jim, glancing through his morning paper on 25th January—the eve of Dora's wedding day—lighted on a paragraph announcing that Sir Savile Smart was also in attendance at the invalid's bedside. The three doctors had issued the following bulletin on the previous evening:—

The Earl of Lingfield is in a critical condition. Should no improvement take place during the next twelve hours, an operation will be rendered imperative.

(Signed) SAVILE SMART, F.R.C.S. E. A. M'IVER, M.D.
JOHN MORTIMER, M.D.

Jim smiled affectionately at the sight of his grandfather's familiar name thus figuring in the public press. He was turning to another item of news, when there came a thundering rat-tat at No. 9's front door, and next moment Mary entered with a telegram, which she handed to Jim. He tore open the envelope. The message it contained was addressed from "Carhall," Lord Lingfield's country seat near Threeways, and ran:—

Come by first train. Most urgent.—SAVILE SMART.

Jim stared in amaze at the summons. This was, indeed, a strange turn of fortune's wheel. He—Jim Mortimer—was evidently required to assist in an operation in which his grandfather would also be participating! He had helped Sir Savile in this very operation a score of times, and had performed it by himself at Matt's with the great specialist looking on. For Jim had guessed the nature of the operation when Sir Savile was sent for.

"And so he wants me to lend a hand. Good man!"

In a few moments Jim had looked up a train. There was an express leaving for Threeways in half an hour. Just time! Mary flew for a cab, Jim got into his hat and coat, and was away before the Maybury family had fully grasped the reason of his haste or the exalted nature of his destination.

"Half-a-sovereign if you catch the 9.30 at Liverpool Street," said Jim to the cabman.

"Right, sir!" said the cabby, joyously.

But the roads were slippery, and travelling was bad. Horses steamed and plunged, drivers lashed and swore—and Jim's cab made slow progress.

At last the cabby found an opening and dashed forward. But, alas! he had just got up speed, when his horse stumbled and fell, and could not regain its feet, despite its frantic struggles.

Jim leapt out nimbly. "Hard luck, cabby!" he said. "Here's your half-sov."

"You're a gentleman, sir," returned the driver, touching his hat as he went to undo the prostrate nag's harness.

Jim took a fresh cab, and caught his train with a minute to spare. He welcomed this journey, for the rapid motion suited him to a nicety. This was better than brooding in his surgery—this was action, life, excitement. The country was anxiously awaiting news of the great statesman's illness—and Jim was to help in the drama. The operation would not be performed, Jim knew, until he arrived at Lord Lingfield's residence ... and the train whirled on, and Jim, though sore at heart—for was not Dora to be married on the morrow?—derived great comfort from Sir Savile's call.

The train sped on, and Jim's thoughts raced along with it. His brain and the mighty engine kept stride for stride.

"To-morrow! To-morrow!" sang the whirling wheels.

As the meadows, streams, and woods came into view and as quickly passed out again, so the events of the last few months presented themselves panoramawise to Jim's mind. The tea-shop—the dainty girl with the fairest face in the world—he in raptures, with Koko soberly listening—the vacation—the return—the introduction—the fight at the Exhibition—his grandfather's letter—No. 9—the surgery in Mount Street—and ... that night in the Crescent! Ah, that one kiss! ...

Meadows, streams, woods flashed into view and out again as the express flew eastwards. London was left farther and farther behind, and Dora with it. Jim's heart telegraphed her a farewell. To-morrow she was to be married—*to-morrow!* So good-bye, little Dora—good-bye! ...

"THREEWAYS! THREEWAYS!"

Here he was at last! A tall footman was on the platform. Evidently he had received a description of Jim, for he advanced directly the latter stepped out of the train, and in another half-minute Jim was rolling along a road very dear and familiar to his eyes.

It was four miles to Lord Lingfield's residence—and the earl's fine bays made a mouthful of the journey.

"Sir Savile wishes to see you at once, sir," said the butler, as Jim entered the

lofty hall of the great house.

Jim followed the servant into the library. Sir Savile was leaning back in a big easy-chair, and Jim noted with some concern that the specialist's right arm was in a sling. By his side stood Jim's grandfather. The third doctor was in the sick-room.

Sir Savile, without rising, put out his left hand.

"My dear Mortimer, this is splendid of you! You have not lost a moment!"

They shook hands. Jim turned to his grandfather. "How do you do, sir?" he said, flushing a little.

Dr Mortimer bent his head slightly, but did not speak.

"I suppose you were surprised to receive my message?" said Sir Savile. "The fact is, I've had an accident. I was coming downstairs this morning, when I fell and dislocated my shoulder. That being the case, I wired to you--"

"I shall be pleased to assist in any way I can," said Jim.

The specialist smiled. "You haven't got to assist, Mortimer—you've got to operate yourself."

"I, sir!" cried Jim.

"Yes, *you*! You're the best man in England after me, as I have reason to know. So, when I found myself out of the running, I sent for you. I shall direct you, and you will receive assistance from my colleagues, but the success or failure of the operation will rest entirely in your hands. If you succeed, you're a made man; if you fail--"

"I shall not fail," said Jim quietly.

"I know you won't, my boy," said Sir Savile; "for, if I had had any doubt of you, I shouldn't have sent for you ... and now we will go upstairs."

CHAPTER XXV. IN THE SILENT HOUSE.

At six o'clock that night Jim Mortimer caught a train back to London. He had operated with complete success, and every evening paper in the country had published the reassuring bulletin which Sir Savile drew up after the satisfactory completion of Jim's task.

Had the operation failed, no mention would have been made of Jim's participation in the affair. But the young surgeon had come through the trying

ordeal with an unshaken nerve and triumphant skill, and Sir Savile was more than satisfied.

It was the concluding sentence of the bulletin, therefore, which caused universal surprise and set the whole medical world by the ears—as well as a multitude of laymen—until the fact of the specialist’s accident became public knowledge.

The operation was performed by Mr James Mortimer, M.R.C.S., late of St Matthew’s Hospital.

Thus did Sir Savile, with a few strokes of his pen, make Jim famous. He need not have said anything of the kind, for the operation was carried out under his close personal supervision, but he was a big man, with a big mind, and he did not hesitate for a moment about crediting Jim with the entire success of the perilous undertaking. A tremor in Jim’s hand, a slip of his knife, and Lord Lingfield’s name would have been added to the roll of illustrious dead. But Jim’s hand did not tremble, nor did his knife slip, and so the happy bulletin went forth, and the world was glad because a good man had been saved to it.

The proud lady who had spoken to Jim from her carriage on that fine September day was a different woman altogether when she thanked him for what he had done. The aristocratic bearing and the air of fine breeding were there, but her words were those of a wife sore stricken by watching and waiting.

And following the mother came the girl Jim had also seen in the carriage on that September day—“the pretty girl.” Jim blushed to the roots of his fair hair when the pretty girl added her gentle thanks to her mother’s.

“Your fee, my boy,” said Sir Savile, encountering Jim a little later in the library. The slip of paper he pushed into Mortimer’s hand was a cheque for a hundred pounds.

“But, sir—” began Jim, who did not want a penny, so highly had he been paid in other ways.

“Not a word. It’s my case, and I’m not down here for love, I can tell you. Take your cheque, boy, and buy your girl a necklace out of it. By the way, how are you getting on with Maybury’s nice daughter?”

“She is to be married to-morrow,” said Jim, turning to look at a picture.

The great surgeon, however, did not miss the change in his voice. Jim went on looking at the picture, and kept his back to Sir Savile, who put his left hand—his right not being available—on his old pupil’s shoulder.

“Have I touched a tender spot, lad? Well, cheer up! It’s a wide world, with a heap of other pretty girls in it!”

And then he discreetly left Jim alone, and Jim studied the picture for some

time longer, though he could not have told you afterwards whether it was a landscape or a portrait of a deceased noble earl of Lingfield.

There was no fast train back to town till six, so Jim had perforce to remain on at Carhall. He did not see anything more of his grandfather, who left the house after affixing his signature to the bulletin. He made no inquiry for Jim, and Sir Savile looked perplexed when he saw that his old friend did not intend to budge an inch from the relentless attitude he had adopted towards his grandson.

"And yet," mused the specialist, "he must feel as proud as Punch of the lad!"

Jim had a smoking-carriage all to himself on his return journey. He was glad of that, for he wanted to think of Dora, and solitude suited his mood. After this night he would have to put her out of his thoughts altogether, but to-night she was still Dora Maybury—still the queen of his heart. To-morrow Jim must in honour cease to be her subject; but to-morrow had not come yet. Soon enough the new day, dawning, would bring desolation to his love.

Strange that the turning-point in Jim's career should have come on Dora's wedding eve! Seemingly it was one of those compensatory acts wherewith Dame Fortune makes amends for the hard blows she deals. Jim knew that this day's success was good enough to make a specialist of him right away. And what joy would have filled his heart, this journey, had he been speeding back to Dora's side—he could imagine, had she been his, the pride that would have lit up her face when she heard of his achievement!

As the train cleft the darkness, eating up a mile of iron road with each minute that passed, Jim, just for the sake of the melancholy pleasure he extracted from it, let his fancy wander in the world of make-believe. Dora was *his*, and was awaiting him. He had only dreamed that she was another's. London to him now was no grimy, smoke-begirt city, but a palace of delight set in a garden fragrant with "the blended odours of a thousand flowers."

But, alas for such vain imaginings! A rough voice roused Jim from his half-dose, and a rain-spotted hand awaited his ticket.... It was London, and London in its dampest and most dismal garb.

Jim had wired from Threeways asking Koko to meet him at his surgery at eight. He thought they might spend the evening together amid cheery surroundings.

Koko had not arrived at the surgery when he got there. The fire was out—Mrs Brown, taking advantage of her master's absence, was probably carousing with other ladies of her own station. Mount Street appeared exceptionally sordid and forlorn. Everything seemed to have conspired to add to Jim's weight of sadness.

He lit the gas, and as it flared up he was slightly startled to observe the figure of a man huddled up on the sofa. On the floor, by the head of the sofa, stood an empty glass jar.

Jim walked across the room and inspected the sleeper. It was the old provision dealer.

"Wake up, Mr Harris!" he cried; "wake up! What are you doing here?"

The provision dealer slowly opened his eyes.

"Ain't I—ain't I dead, then?" he demanded.

"*Dead?* No! You're as alive as I am!"

"I thought I'd swallowed enough of the stuff to do the job."

"What stuff?"

"Vy, the prussic acid. That's deadly p'ison, ain't it?"

"Rather!"

"Well, I swallowed all there vos in the bottle ... and I ain't dead, it seems."

Jim surveyed the empty jar, and found it to be the mislabelled vessel in which he kept his whisky safe from Mrs Brown's thirsty raids.

"You're a foolish old man!" said Jim. "Never you try on any trick of that sort again—d'you hear?"

"Vy didn't it kill me?" inquired the dealer in an aggrieved voice.

"Because what you drank wasn't poison—luckily for you."

"Vould it have been enough if it had been p'ison?"

"Yes, enough to kill an elephant."

Old Harris shuddered.

"Vould it have hurt?" he asked.

"It would have burnt your inside up and curled you into a knot. Yes, it would have hurt a bit."

Mr Harris shook his head.

"It vos Isaac drove me to it. I felt I couldn't stand that velp no longer—'e drove me to it."

Mr Harris looked very bleared. He had swallowed half a pint of neat spirit, and the room seemed to be going round him.

"Well," said Jim, "you may thank your stars that wasn't prussic acid. When you feel better, get along home and turn into bed."

"I vill, doctor, I vill," whined the old Jew; "and I'll pull up—so 'elp me, I vill."

"That's right," said Jim; "now take another nap—it'll do you good."

As Jim turned towards the counter, his eye lighted on a folded piece of paper. Picking it up, he found it to be a note that had been left for him.

It ran:—

mrs murphy's respects and Will the doctor come round to number 8 pine Court to See her baby.

top floor.

Jim often received such rough missives. This, in fact, was rather a literary performance than otherwise for Pine Court.

He tossed the note back on to the counter, buttoned up his overcoat, and sallied forth promptly. He left the light burning, and scribbled "Back soon" on a sheet of paper for Koko's information.

His destination was only seven minutes' walk distant. Not a soul was to be seen as Jim made his way down the narrow alley by which one reached the court from the street. If it were possible, this place appeared even more forlorn than the outer world.

It seemed to Jim, as he passed into No. 8, that the building was curiously silent. As he ascended to the first floor not a sound fell on his ears. The house smelt damp, and had an unoccupied air about it. Could it be that this was the tenement which had been recently condemned as unfit for habitation, owing to its rottenness? If so, why was Mrs Murphy installed on the top floor?

Jim knew, however, that it was hard to make some of these wretched beings go, even out of a house such as this. Mrs Murphy would probably be evicted in due course. Meanwhile, her baby was ill, and Jim had got to doctor the little thing.

So dark was it that he had to light matches in order to see his way up the creaking staircase. And as he ascended to the second floor he was entirely unconscious of the fact that he was being followed. For behind him, with cunning stealth, crept a man with a bandaged head.

[image]

*BEHIND HIM, WITH CUNNING STEALTH, CREPT A MAN WITH
A BANDAGED HEAD.*

As Jim went higher the silence struck him yet more forcibly, and he began to wonder whether he could have made a mistake about the number. Still, there was no harm in seeing whether Mrs Murphy was located on the top floor. So he continued his ascent, the figure behind pursuing him with noiseless steps.

At last! Here was the top floor, and here was a crazy-looking door. And still there was absolutely no sign or sound of a living presence in the place.

He knocked at the door.

"Does Mrs Murphy live here?" he called.

"Yes; come in," replied a woman's voice.

So he turned the handle and pushed the door open.

Instantly he stopped; the room was innocent of any furniture, but confronting him stood half a dozen roughs, and dimly, in the background, he could distinguish a woman's form.

It was a trap—and safety lay only in immediate flight. He turned towards the stairs, but, as he did so, the man with the bandaged head tripped him up, so that Jim fell backwards into the room. One wild glance he cast upon his assailant, and then the bandaged man, with a savage snarl, swung his belt. The buckle hit Jim full on the forehead; there came a great roaring in his ears, and while he was feebly grasping the air the buckle descended again and finished its work.

CHAPTER XXVI. THE VULTURES.

For a moment the Hooligan stood motionless, as if surprised by the ease with which he had accomplished his revenge. For a moment only, however. Approaching the prostrate form of the young doctor, he gave Jim a savage kick in the side. Jim did not move or speak.

"We've got 'im this time, boys," exclaimed the rough. "He's done."

But here there was an unlooked-for interruption. The woman whose voice had lured Jim to his destruction ran forward and confronted the leader of the gang.

She was a flower-seller, and had the healthy complexion common to her open-air calling. A thick mane of black hair hung over her eyes, and she was ill-kempt and shabby, but she was not wholly without grace of form or feature.

"You said it was an old gent coming up for rent. You lied. It's the tall doctor."

The Hooligan glared at her.

"Well,—wot then?"

"If I'd known it was 'im, I'd 'ave warned 'im, that's wot! 'E saved my baby's life. You shan't touch 'im again."

The Hooligan waved her off without ceremony.

"Shut your silly mouth, will you! It's done now. Get back over there, or I'll

treat you as I've treated 'im."

Appalled by his tone, the woman shrank back to the gloomy corner whence she had emerged.

The others laughed coarsely. The room was dimly illumined by the light that came from the lamp-post in the court without, but this was sufficient to show them that their victim was unconscious, if not dead.

"See wot's on him," said one, a hunchback.

They crowded round the still figure, and commenced a quick search of Jim's pockets. The bandaged man—not without some wrangling—was allowed to retain Mortimer's watch and chain; the hunchback greedily possessed himself of the coins he extracted from Jim's pockets—two half-sovereigns, some silver, and a few coppers; another of the gang annexed Jim's cuff-links and studs.

The other four savagely demanded that the money, at least, should be divided up amongst them, and were assured that they would get their share. They received this promise with remarks that indicated that there was little honour among these thieves, and it looked as if a struggle for the booty were about to ensue, when the hunchback made a discovery which rendered the other finds insignificant in comparison.

"'Ere's a cheque."

So saying, he struck a match with feverish haste.

"'Undred pounds! My Sam! This is a bit o' luck. 'E didn't get this out o' Mount Street, I'll wager."

"Let's 'ave a squint at it," said the bandaged man. "Ay," he continued, after examining the pink and white slip, "this is a bit of orl right. 'Undred quid! That'll be nearly fifteen quid apiece."

"A bit o' paper like that ain't no good to us," growled one of the gang; "'ow can we change it? 'Ooever tries to will be nabbed."

The hunchback interposed. "Don't you make no mistake, Jerry. We can change it. Gentleman 'Arry 'll do it. 'E can get up just like a toff—he wasn't a valit six years for nuthink. It ain't crossed, and so 'e can get cash over the counter. 'E's told me that when 'e was in service 'e often changed cheques for the nobs wot employed 'im."

Thereupon the bandaged man arranged with the hunchback that "Gentleman 'Arry" was to be approached on the subject that night, and promised five pounds if he changed the cheque first thing in the morning.

"There ain't nuthink else on 'im, is there?" inquired the bandaged man, when this matter had been settled.

The hunchback went all through Jim's pockets again, but his search only yielded some keys, a pocket-handkerchief, and a few letters.

"No, nuthink else, mates."

"Then we'll clear."

As they all rose to their feet, the flower-seller again confronted the leader.

"Ow about me?" she demanded. "Didn't I get 'im in 'ere? 'E'd 'ave cottoned something was wrong if 'e 'adn't been answered by a woman."

The Hooligans grinned at each other. The bandaged man had arranged this matter with the girl; it was no business of the others.

"Oh, you shall 'ave a new 'at, Sally," the bandaged man assured her, with a leer.

"Wot else?"

"Anyfink yer like, Sally. But I thought you did it out o' friendship for me, because I was so kind to your 'usband before they nabbed 'im," added the Hooligan, with an unpleasant grimace.

"I'll see I get my share," said the girl, showing her white teeth.

"Wot! Would you take the kind doctor's 'ard-earned welf? 'Im wot was so good to yore byby! For shame, Sally!"

"E's done for now, and it doesn't matter to 'im. I'll 'ave my share, or know the reason why."

"You'll split on us?"

"Yes, on the 'ole lot of yer! I don't join in a dirty job like this for love. I've a baby to keep at 'ome, and I want money, so you watch it!"

The bandaged man winked at his fellows. "That'll be orl right," he said. "It's on'y 'er wye. Well, let's get out o' this, boys."

As the others moved towards the door the bandaged man and the girl stayed by Jim's side. As the former gazed upon the prostrate and silent figure, an evil smile distorted his countenance. "We're quits now," he muttered, shaking his fist at the white face, "you an' me. You 'urt me, and now I've 'urt you."

A twinge in the wound which he had come by through Jim's agency made him wince. He uttered an appalling oath.

"No, we ain't quite quits! I'll spoil your beauty for you, to end with, my pretty doctor."

He raised his iron-shod heel above Jim's face, but ere the foot could descend the flower-girl pushed the Hooligan aside with such force that he reeled against the wall.

"Leave 'im alone—ain't you satisfied?" she exclaimed sharply.

The man recovered himself with another oath, and smacked the girl across the face with his open hand.

"That's for you, you interferin' cat!"

With a snarl worthy of the creature she had been likened to, the girl hurled herself at her aggressor, and clawed his face with venomous finger-nails. In the struggle the Hooligan's bandage came off, revealing an unhealed wound. Crying

out with pain, the rough threw the girl off with all his might, and, turning quickly, was hacking at Jim's head and body, when the girl, regaining her balance, flung herself across the motionless figure on the floor, and there remained while the Hooligan kicked and struck both at herself and Jim with ungovernable fury. Time and again he tried to drag her away, but she held staunch to her post in spite of his blows and execrations.

By this time the Hooligan had worked himself into a state of frenzy. Seeing that he could not get the girl away, he drew a knife from his belt, but, even as he poised it to strike, the door was kicked open and a man appeared.

Then a voice rang out commandingly; George Somers—for Koko it was—had never spoken so in his life before.

"Drop that knife or I fire."

With the howl of a maddened animal the Hooligan sprang to his feet and bounded forward. The blade flashed ominously in the lamplight. As it swept downwards towards Koko's heart, there was a sharp report, followed by a shriek from the Hooligan, who swayed, clutching at the air, and then toppled forward in a heap, shot through the brain.

Simultaneously came sounds of heavy footsteps on the stairs. The other members of the gang made a dash for the doorway, but as they reached it several stalwart forms barred their exit. The Hooligans, realising their position, fought like tigers to escape, but the police, having been forewarned of trouble by old Harris, had their truncheons ready, and used them without stint. Two of the Hooligans dropped to the floor; another, a big fellow, closed with one of the constables, and they went swinging and stumbling into the passage without. Taking his opportunity, the hunchback crept out on to the dark staircase, and was softly descending when suddenly two bony hands seized him by the neck, and next moment he and old Harris were rolling over and over down the rotten stairs, the Jew dealer hanging on to the half-strangled dwarf with a nervous grip which the other could not overcome, beat and tear as he would. Halfway down the stairs the writhing pair were met by another couple of policemen, by whom the hunchback was quickly secured and handcuffed.

The reinforcing police speedily settled the matter, and all the Hooligans were soon in custody.

When at length the police were able to draw breath more easily and look around, they found Somers kneeling by his friend. By Jim's side lay the insensible form of the flower-seller who had befriended him with such strange suddenness.

"Jim, old chap! Jim!" cried Koko. "Jim, speak to me."

No sound came from Jim's lips. He lay as he had fallen, with his white face upturned to the ceiling. But that face was without a mark, so well shielded had it been by the woman.

"Here, sir, try this," said one of the police, holding out a pocket-flask.

Quickly Koko unscrewed the top and forced the mouth of the flask between his friend's lips. The raw spirit trickled down Jim's throat, and, to Koko's unspeakable relief, Mortimer opened his eyes.

"Is that—you—old man?"

"Yes, Jim! Here, swallow some more. Oh, Jim," he added, in a trembling voice, "I'm so glad! I thought—you were dead!"

Jim gave a little sigh. "I think they've done for me. I can't move—they've hurt my back..."

Koko shivered, for he knew what Jim meant.

"We'll take you to the hospital, old man," he said, "and you'll soon be all right."

Jim's lips moved in reply, and Koko put down his ear.

"Take me home," said Jim—and fainted away.

CHAPTER XXVII. THE HOME-COMING.

On the day preceding that fixed for her wedding, Dora Maybury purposely went down to breakfast later than usual, as she wished to be alone during the meal. She did not want to meet the prying eyes of her elder sister, or answer her still more prying questions.

Miss H. R. Maybury, however, was not easily put off. This was the last day that the two sisters would be spending under the same roof for some time to come, and H. R. intended to make the most of it.

When, therefore, Dora reached the breakfast-room, she found her sister seated behind the coffee-urn.

"It is rather provoking of you to be so late, Dora," said H. R. "We have had to keep breakfast on the table for an hour, just on your account."

"You needn't have done that," replied Dora, coldly; "I only want a cup of tea and some bread and butter."

"You won't look much like a bride to-morrow if you starve yourself to-day," observed H. R.

Dora made no rejoinder, but took her seat at the table.

"There isn't any tea—won't coffee do?" inquired H. R.

"Anything will do," said Dora, shortly.

"Dear me!" cried H. R. "I hope you will be in a nicer mood when you sit down to breakfast for the first time with Harold."

"I expect he'll say pleasanter things to me than you do," returned Dora.

H. R. was taken somewhat aback. "Here is some coffee," she said, more amicably; "there is a plate of bacon and eggs for you in the fender," she added.

"I couldn't *touch* it!" cried Dora.

"I don't see why you should lose your appetite because you're going to be married to-morrow," said H. R.

"Don't you? Well, perhaps you'll understand my feelings better when you find *yourself* on the eve of *your* wedding day!" snapped Dora.

H. R., having no reply ready, pretended to read the morning paper.

At length something occurred to her

"Oh, by the way, dear," she said, when Dora had sipped her coffee and nibbled a few mouthfuls of bread and butter, "some more presents have come for you."

"Oh!" said Dora, indifferently

"They are on the hall table—shall I get them for you?"

"If you like. I am in no hurry."

But H. R. had recognised Jim's writing on one parcel, and wanted to watch her sister's face when Dora opened the packet. Jim, it should be added had placed the presents from Koko and himself on the hall table very late on the previous night.

H. R. left the breakfast-room, and presently returned bearing three parcels in her arms.

"I think there must be one from Frank, too; he was wrapping up something very mysteriously before he went to school this morning."

Dora turned over the three parcels which H. R. set down on the table before her. After scrutinising the writing on each, she opened that addressed to her in Frank's irregular round-hand. Frank's present proved to be a volume of Tennyson's works in a handsome morocco leather cover.

"Dear Frank! what a nice present!" cried Dora. "He must have saved up his pocket-money for months!"

"He gets a good many tips," said H. R., drily.

"Pretty girls' brothers generally do," observed a harsh voice at the door.

Following the remark came Miss Bird herself. The maiden lady duly admired the Tennyson.

"The other two presents," said H. R., "are from Mr Somers and Dr Mortimer, and Dora *won't* open them because she knows I'm burning to see them."

"And make nasty remarks about them when you've seen them?" suggested

Miss Bird.

Before H. R. could think of a suitable retort, Dora had drawn Koko's present from its enclosing wrappers.

"A *work-box*—full of things!" she said, laughing; "everything I can possibly want, even down to matches!"

The three ladies all agreed that it was a very nice work-box.

"And now for the third parcel," said H. R., meaningly.

"It is a fan," said Dora, quietly opening Jim's parcel—"an ivory one."

She passed it on to Miss Bird.

"A beautiful present, my dear," said that lady. "I admire Dr Mortimer's taste."

"And look!" cried H. R., who next inspected the fan; "it has a sprig of rosemary upon it. How very sentimental! That means remembrance, doesn't it? Dora, I do believe Dr Mortimer likes you more than he cares to admit."

"Please don't talk such nonsense, H. R.," said Dora, holding out her hand for the fan.

"Come, now," said H. R., spreading out the fan and peeping over it, "tell me! Don't you think I'm right?"

"Right about what?" asked Dora, with trembling lips. "Oh, please give me my fan!"

"Give the child her fan and don't tease her," rasped out Miss Bird, who saw through the deliberate malice of H. R.'s question.

"Why doesn't she answer, then?" said H. R., examining the sprig of rosemary with renewed interest; "anybody would think that she liked *him* by the way she goes on."

The blood rushed into Dora's face.

"See how she is blushing!" added H. R., unsparingly.

"I'm not blushing," cried Dora, whose cheeks sadly belied her words.

"You are—I believe you *do* like him!"

Dora rose from her chair. The blood had died out of her face, and she was very white.

"And why," she demanded, her eyes flashing ominously, "*shouldn't* I like him? Is there any sin in it? When he came you all condemned him, but he has been quite patient and nice and gentlemanly all the time, in spite of the things that have been said to him. Yes, I *do* like him, and I shall always value this present from him. Please give it to me."

H. R. handed her the fan. "In *that* case, Dora, dear," she said, cuttingly, "it seems a pity that you are marrying Mr Jefferson to-morrow."

Dora closed the fan and held it tightly to her bosom. Her sister's final remark had brought the blood surging into her face again. "Oh," she cried, "how

I *hate* you, H. R.—yes, *hate* you!”

And with that she gave a piteous little cry and ran out of the room.

For a few moments there was silence, and then Miss Bird turned her stern, lined face towards the elder sister. “Miss Maybury,” she said, “I am ashamed of you.”

“Your opinion of me,” said H. R., with a forced lightness of tone, “does not concern me at all.”

“To think,” Miss Bird went on, “that you should taunt that poor child with a fact that has been patent to every woman in this house for *weeks* past! You have seen it—you know it. I repeat, I am heartily ashamed of you.”

“Please spare me your lectures, Miss Bird.”

“I will spare you nothing. I tell you to your face that you are a cruel, jealous woman. Dora is much younger than you, but is being married before you, and that is rankling in your mind. And so you bully her and tax her with liking Dr Mortimer when you *know* she likes him—ay, likes him far better than she likes the man she is marrying.”

“But,” interrupted H. R.; “Mr Jefferson happens to be very well off, and so our dear little innocent Dora does not see her way to give him up.”

Miss Bird rose from her seat and walked up to where H. R. was sitting.

“Do you really *know* why Dora is marrying this young stockbroker?” she said.

“Because she is tired of working in the post-office, and wants to have a good time, I suppose,” replied H. R.

“Oh! you suppose that! Well, I will tell you why. She is marrying him because she wishes to make your father’s position secure in the Jeffersons’ office, and, if possible, to improve it. She is deliberately marrying young Mr Jefferson with that object in view.”

“Then she is very silly,” said H. R., scornfully.

“*Silly!* Yes, she *is* silly! But how old is she?—*nineteen!* And at nineteen aren’t many girls *very* silly—aren’t their heads full of romantic ideas of self-sacrifice, and other nonsense! Yes, she *is* silly! If she were your age—twenty-eight—she would be marrying Mr Jefferson for her own sake, but she is only nineteen, and so she is marrying him for her father’s sake. Now you understand!”

“I simply don’t believe you,” said H. R.

“It matters little whether you believe me or not. I have told you the truth. I am a very much older woman than you, and it has been my recreation all my life—for want of a better—to watch the people round me and dissect their motives. Old maids are good judges of character. You yourself will find you are a better judge of character in a few years’ time than you are now.”

Then, with this final lash from her tongue, Miss Bird stalked out of the

room, while Miss H. R. Maybury, feeling considerably crestfallen, made her way downstairs to commence her household duties.

Somehow or other Dora got through this miserable day. At lunch and tea and dinner she hardly spoke a word, but she brightened up when her father got home from the office, where he had been working later than usual in order to be free the next day. He had brought an evening paper with him, and read out the latest bulletin concerning the Earl of Lingfield's health.

"So," added the ex-merchant, "our friend Dr Mortimer was not sent for merely to assist. According to this bulletin he actually performed the operation—a very perilous one, I am told."

"It will make him," said Miss Bird, laying down her knitting needles.

"Yes," agreed Mr Maybury, "a man possessed of his nerve and skill will be in great demand. I am sorry in one way, because it will mean that he will leave us."

"I hope this success won't turn his head and drive him back to his vicious courses," said Mrs Maybury, somewhat severely.

Mr Cleave was scanning the new number of his favourite weekly.

"I should not be surprised," he conjectured, in his quavering tenor, "if alcohol proved Mortimer's stumbling-block in life. There is a sad case in the *Ab-stainer's* list this week of a young naval doctor who has lately lost his post on account of his habitual drunkenness."

Miss Bird cast a lowering eye on her fellow-boarder, but before she could make any remark the door was opened with unexpected suddenness, and Mary came in.

"Oh, if you please, mum," she said, addressing Mrs Maybury, "there's some policemen at the door, and Mr Somers, and they've brought Dr Mortimer—"

But here the little maid broke down and burst into tears. Fortunately Koko appeared at this juncture to complete the announcement.

"Jim has been hurt by Hooligans," he said, quietly. "At first I wanted to take him to a hospital, but he told me he would like to be brought here."

"Is he badly hurt?" asked Mr Maybury.

"Yes," said Koko, "very seriously hurt. The police fetched a doctor—"

He paused, for he noticed that Dora had risen to her feet, and, white as death, was awaiting the doctor's verdict.

"The doctor pronounced him to be suffering from concussion of the brain and a fracture of the spine."

Mr Maybury walked out of the room, closing the door after him. The police ambulance containing Jim's unconscious form had been set down in the hall. By the ambulance stood Dr Taplow's representative—the bearded man.

"Please follow me," said Mr Maybury, and those in the drawing-room could

hear ominously heavy footsteps on the stairs as the policemen bore their burden up to Jim's little room on the second landing. Koko slipped out of the drawing-room after giving Mrs Maybury and the others further details concerning the affair. Dora made as if to follow him.

"You had better stay in here, dear," said Mrs Maybury; "anybody else will only be in the way, at present."

"I am only going into the dining-room," said Dora.

How long she waited in the dining-room, Dora never knew. It seemed like a lifetime. She heard the police go out and shut the front door after them, and later she heard the front door opened and closed again, and yet again. At length, after what seemed an interminable period, Mr Maybury came into the dining-room. His face was very grave.

"Father—tell me the truth!"

Dora was looking at him with beseeching eyes that would brook no subterfuge.

"The doctor says," replied Mr Maybury, "that he will not live more than twenty-four hours."

Dora hid her face on his shoulder.

"Oh, father, father," she sobbed, "if he dies my heart will break!"

Mr. Maybury gently disengaged himself from her embrace, and looked steadily into her face.

"Dora, tell me! do you love him?"

She buried her face again in the kind shoulder.

"Yes," she said, "with all my heart."

For a long, tense minute no word was spoken. Then Mr Maybury broke the silence.

"If that is so," he said, "you must not marry Mr Jefferson, and I must go and tell him so."

Dora raised her head. Her eyes shone like stars because of the great love she bore for Jim Mortimer.

"Go, then," she said, "and I promise you I will be brave—now, and until the end."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A DELICATE MISSION.

Mr Harold Jefferson lived in the Albany, where a long succession of well-to-do bachelors, good and bad, have occupied chambers since the days of the later Georges. The bachelor nests in the Temple—so beloved of young Bar students fresh from the 'Varsity—was insignificant in comparison with the lofty, depressing spaciousness which characterises Albany chambers. The rents, too, differ widely, for whereas a man may cut quite a tenemental dash in the Temple for fifty or sixty pounds a year, in the Albany one's rental may run into anything between a hundred and forty and four hundred per annum.

A quaint nook is this Albany. As one paces the stone-flagged footway in the contemplative stillness which broods over the place, it is an easy feat of the imagination to put the clock back a hundred years, to people the lettered houses with bucks and bloods in Regency attire, and, with the fall of night, to set the gaunt old quarter ablaze with candles, and listen to the flick and rattle of cards and dice, the popping of corks, and the sound of those old-fashioned oaths which it was thought fit that gentlemen should use freely in the days when Byron and Macaulay lived in this aristocratic bachelor precinct.

But new times bring new men, and Harold Jefferson was of the newest. He lived in the Albany for the same reason that he drove a motor-car, ploughed the Thames in a steam launch, and frequented fashionable restaurants at fashionable hours—because it was expensive.

On this particular night—the eve of his wedding day—Jefferson was superintending the packing of his various possessions. This was his last night in the Albany, so much had to be done. Albert, his valet, was moving here and there with dapper, noiseless steps, folding, arranging, pressing down, strapping, and locking. Albert was, on the whole, a good valet. He was punctual, obsequious, diplomatic, and only stole odd sixpences and shillings—for his was a mean little nature, content with little thefts.

Albert put up with abuse that no honest man would have listened to in silence. Therefore he suited Jefferson. True, he had no respect whatever for his master, but Jefferson paid him more liberally than, say, a military gentleman would have done, so he stayed on with Jefferson, wore his left-off suits, annexed his small change, and was quite contented with himself in his negative, unambitious way.

Harold, this evening, was in a high good-humour. Everything had fallen out as he had desired that it should do. He was marrying a lovely girl, and would be envied for his prize far and wide. He would dress her in the prettiest attire obtainable for money, deck her out in costly jewels, and constantly bask in the reflected glory of her beauty. When they came back, he promised himself he would take precious good care she didn't pay many calls at No. 9, or have her starveling relations to see her more than twice a year.

At ten o'clock Albert, having completed his tasks, left the Albany. At eleven Jefferson was due at a farewell supper party which was to be given in his honour that night by some of his bachelor friends at the famous Whittingham restaurant, where they charge you eighteen-pence simply for hanging your hat up. The price of food and wine, reckoned on a similar scale, may be imagined. But then, Mr Jefferson and his friends set little store by a meal that did not cost them about six times more than it was worth.

Harold had adjusted his tie and put on his overcoat, preparatory to sallying forth, when there came a knock at his door. Albert having departed, he was obliged to answer the summons himself.

"Mr Maybury!"

Harold's tone smacked more of surprise than cordiality.

"Yes, I am sorry to disturb you, Mr Jefferson, but my errand is an important one. May I come in?"

"Of course, of course! I am afraid I cannot ask you to stay very long, as I have to be at the Whittingham at eleven. Some of my friends are giving me a send-off. Will you have a glass of champagne?"

"No, thank you."

"A cigar, then?"

"Again, no, thank you. Such things would not harmonise with my errand, for I have come, Mr Jefferson, to break some very unpleasant news to you."

"I hope nothing is wrong with Dora?"

"My visit concerns Dora. To come to the point at once, I am afraid that this marriage arranged for to-morrow cannot take place."

Jefferson stared at him aghast.

"In the name of goodness—*why* not?"

Jefferson had seated himself on the table, one slippers foot just touching the floor. Mr Maybury walked up to him.

"I am exceedingly sorry to have to bring you this news. Believe me, I feel for your position. The truth of the matter is, Dora loves another man, and therefore it would be most wrong on my part to allow your marriage with her to take place."

Jefferson stared at his visitor in amazement

"Are you quite sober, sir?" he demanded.

"Yes, I am absolutely sober."

"Then allow me to tell you that you are talking so much tomfoolery! Of course the marriage must take place! How on earth can you have allowed yourself to come here with such a suggestion? I suppose Dora is in a state of nervousness that borders on hysteria and so has got some foolish fancy into her head that she doesn't like me enough. For Heaven's sake, man, go home and reason with her, and don't delay me any longer with such a wild-goose tale."

The ex-merchant regarded Jefferson with a cool and resolute gaze.

"This is not a wild-goose tale. Dora is not hysterical. Nor is this a foolish fancy of hers. She prefers young Mortimer to you, and it would be an unpardonable crime on my part to allow her to marry you."

"Mortimer!—*that* bounder!"

"She loves Mortimer—and he is not, I may add, a bounder. He is as good a gentleman as I have ever met."

The situation was getting serious. Jefferson took off his overcoat and lit a cigarette. Then—by way of steadying his own nerves—he mixed himself a whisky and soda. Finally he came to a halt opposite his visitor, and as he did so his lips set in an ugly and determined line.

"Now, look here, Maybury," he said, blowing a column of smoke ceilingwards, "let us talk sense. Dora likes this Mortimer—I have known that for a long time. To-night his name is in every mouth—yes, I have read in the evening papers of what he has done. And so it suddenly occurs to her that she would prefer to be the wife of a brilliant young surgeon rather than of a—well, of a not very brilliant young stockbroker."

Mr Maybury held up his hand, but Jefferson would not be silenced.

"She comes to you in tears, declaring she cannot marry me. You, not knowing women as I do, are convinced by her tears, and come straight off to me to say the marriage can't take place. You are, if you will excuse me for saying so, a fool. I will marry Dora to-morrow, and afterwards I will prove to you that I am as good a man as any common cad of a surgeon you may please to take into your house as a lodger!"

Jefferson's eyes were blazing with fury. The whisky had done its work.

"I have already told you," returned Mr Maybury, in even, quiet tones, "that I feel very much for you. The abandonment of this match will put you in a very awkward position, but I must repeat that the marriage cannot and *shall not* take place."

"And *I say*," shouted Jefferson, "that I will not be bested by Mortimer. He shall not marry Dora. I look to her to keep her promise. Mortimer shall never have her!"

"No, he never will," said Mr Maybury.

"What! You said just now that she prefers him to me!"

"She will never marry him," Mr Maybury resumed, "because in all probability he will be dead within four-and-twenty hours!"

"*Dead!*" Jefferson's face lit up with renewed hope.

"Yes, he has been severely mauled by a gang of Hooligans. The medical man who has seen him declares that his case is hopeless."

Jefferson did not speak for a few moments. Then he burst into a laugh.

"I see—I see it all! Mortimer is brought in unconscious, and Dora promptly faints. She is inclined to be sentimental, as I know. And so you come here and tell me I mustn't marry her. Did ever man set out on such a preposterous errand? My good Maybury, I shall be at the church to-morrow, and if you and your daughter are not there you will never set foot in my office again."

"We shall certainly not be there," replied Mr Maybury.

"We shall see. You've got a night to sleep on it. My father is ill, and is away on the Continent. I am head of the firm during his absence. Fail to keep your contract to-morrow afternoon, and you need never show your face in my office again. Were my father in London he would support me, for he will not see me insulted in this manner. I will telegraph to him, if you like."

"You need not do that," said Mr Maybury, moving towards the door; "I accept my dismissal at your hands."

Jefferson laughed again. "I really think you cannot be quite sober. Just reflect on what you are doing. Can you afford to throw up your job with us?"

Mr Maybury turned fiercely upon the young man. "*Afford!* Listen to me, Mr Jefferson. My child's happiness is to me a matter of higher importance than my post in your firm. I am a poor man—Heaven knows!—and want every penny I earn as your book-keeper, but that fact will not deter me from doing what I conceive to be my duty. I say my child shall *not* marry you."

And without another word Dora's father turned on his heel and went his way.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DOCTOR VISITS MOUNT STREET.

When Koko left No. 9, after seeing Jim put to bed, he went straight to Taplow's surgery, and was lucky enough to find that the bearded man was still there.

"Doctor, I want you to spend the night with Mortimer," said Koko.

"Impossible," said the bearded man. "I have an urgent case which will keep me up till four."

"What's to be done, then?"

"Get a trained nurse—I'll give you the address of a place in the West End where about two hundred of them live when they have no case on. Telephone the manageress, and say you want a nurse sent to No. 9 Derby Crescent to-night.

I'll look in at breakfast-time."

He gave Koko the address of the nurses' home.

"Right!" said Koko. "Now, doctor, tell me candidly—has Mortimer got a chance?"

"Not a ghost of one," said the bearded man; "even if he pulled through he would be paralysed for the rest of his life, but he won't pull through. The mischief is in the spine—where he was kicked."

"I shot the fellow," said Koko, between his teeth.

"Did you? Well, I don't suppose he will be much loss. If the police were allowed to carry revolvers we shouldn't hear much more of this Hooliganism."

Koko paced restlessly up and down the surgery, and then turned abruptly to the bearded man.

"Look here, doctor," he exclaimed, "I don't want to hurt your feelings, but is it possible that you're mistaken about my friend Mortimer?"

"Time will show," said the bearded man, coldly. "I give him twenty-four hours. Now, if you're ready, I'll turn the gas out. I must be off."

With a sorrowful heart Koko hailed a cab and drove to the nurses' home. He had experienced too many of the telephone's delays. At the home he promptly engaged a nurse, waited while she packed her box, and then conveyed her to No. 9, where he confided her to the care of Mrs Maybury.

After this Koko made his way to a telegraph office in the Strand, and inquired whether he could wire to Threeways. He was told that he was too late. He therefore wrote out a telegram, briefly informing old Dr Mortimer of what had happened, and left it with the clerk at the counter to be dispatched directly the office opened on the following morning.

Then Koko, worn out, sought his bed. At ten the next morning he had to appear at the Blackfriars police court to answer the charge of "causing the death" of the bandaged Hooligan, and also to give evidence against the six roughs in custody.

About eleven the next morning Dr Mortimer arrived at No. 9, and was ushered up to Jim's bedroom. A brief examination told him that his grandson was very far gone indeed, and so without delay he drove to Harley Street and alighted at the door of Trefusis, the first authority on spine trouble. Dr Trefusis promised to proceed to Derby Crescent immediately. A few doors lower down lived Sir Savile Smart. Dr Mortimer was so fortunate as to find him in.

"Smart, I want you to come and look at my boy."

"Jim! What's wrong?"

"The Hooligans have been at him. I want you to meet Trefusis and give an opinion. Brain and spine injuries. You'll come?"

"My shoulder hurts; but I'll come with pleasure."

By one o'clock Jim had been examined by the two great surgeons. During the process they both looked grave, but at the end of it Sir Savile drew a deep breath of relief.

"He's a tough young dog. We shall pull him through, Trefusis?"

The spine man looked doubtful

"We may. He'll be unconscious for a week. When he comes round we shall be able to tell better."

Then the specialist turned to Dr Mortimer.

"I will do my best for your boy, sir. He may live. I cannot say with certainty. A great deal depends on the nursing. I'll come to-morrow. Good-day.

Soon after the two surgeons had driven off, Koko arrived at No. 9. He had satisfied the magistrate that he had shot the Hooligan because his own life was threatened, and had subsequently given some solid evidence against the six prisoners, all of whom were committed for trial. Koko, however, had still to attend the inquest on the dead Hooligan, to be held two days later, and exonerate himself from all blame.

Mr Maybury introduced Koko to Dr Mortimer.

"This is your grandson's great friend—Mr Somers."

They shook hands.

"I thought your name was Coke," said the old Doctor.

"Jim calls me Koko because I am rather bald," explained Somers, meekly.

"And you saved Jim's life last night?"

"I shot—"

"Yes, I read about that in the paper. Will you shake hands with me again? ... and now please take me round to my boy's surgery. I've only seen a photograph of it up to the present."

Side by side the wealthy Eastfolk doctor and the little sporting reporter walked out of Derby Crescent into the bustling Blackfriars Road, and presently wheeled out of that thoroughfare into Mount Street.

"What a detestable district!" exclaimed Dr Mortimer as they were passing the Nathans' fried fish shop, from which proceeded a by no means delectable odour of hissing horse fat.

"It's Jim's country," said Koko.

"Is he popular round here?"

"They love him," said Koko.

The old Doctor's face just then was a study. He may have been thinking of Threeways, where he had resided for so many years without endearing himself to a single soul.

"What sort of a living has my grandson made here?" he asked presently.

"Oh, he has scraped along."

Dr Mortimer cleared his throat.

"When he was at Matthew's he used to run up very extravagant tailors' bills--indeed, he ran up extravagant bills of all kinds."

"I know he did," said Koko.

"I expect," continued Dr Mortimer, "he has rather missed that sort of thing over here."

"He hasn't had any new things since he's been here," said Koko.

The Doctor cleared his throat again. "I presume--er--I presume he had sufficient clothes?"

"Oh yes--but last winter's things had to do, you know."

The Doctor was silent for some moments. The Jim who could make old things do was not the Jim he had known. Jim, up to last September, had always been fastidious about the cut of his coats, and most partial to fancy waistcoats. Not that the Doctor had really minded paying for them--in fact, he had liked to see Jim well-turned-out. What he had objected to was Jim's utter disregard of even moderation in expenditure. And to think that this same Jim had been making last winter's things "do"!

The Doctor reflected a good deal on Koko's replies. It occurred to him that if he had tried to understand Jim better in the past, this split would never have occurred. He had thundered rebukes at Jim much as an army sergeant would upbraid a refractory private, and Jim, in return, had simply been cheeky. Now, supposing he had reasoned with the lad in a kindly, gentle manner, would that not have proved more effectual than inditing fierce epistles to his grandson, when the latter was in town, or shouting a lecture to him across the telephone, as on that September morning of vivid remembrance?

Jim had never known a mother's care. He had been brought up by his grandfather, who had taken a pride in him such as a man takes in a handsome horse or dog. And so Jim ran wild, and, in the end, was expelled from Threeways.

Such were the thoughts that coursed through the old Doctor's mind as he paced down Mount Street by the side of George Somers.

"Here we are," said Koko at length.

So this was Jim's surgery! The old Doctor halted and stared at the shabby-looking corner building. This was where Jim had been getting his living since he had been barred from the old roof-tree in Eastfolk!

[image]

SO THIS WAS JIM'S SURGERY

"Did he rent the entire building?" inquired Dr Mortimer.

"Yes. It was a pawnbroker's place before Jim took it."

"Great heavens! And why did he allow these abominable placards to be pasted on his walls?"

"The old chap who let him the place wanted some money, so Jim made him a present of the outside of the house for advertising purposes," explained Koko.

The Doctor looked amazed.

"Dear! dear! What a quixotic notion!"

"Jim was always like that," said Koko.

The old Doctor bit his lip and again frowned upon the posters. Filling the bill this week at the local theatre was a play in which a steam-roller was the principal attraction. A poster, cunningly attached to Jim's wall, just where his red lamp would shine upon it after dusk, depicted the steam-roller descending a narrow hill at top speed, while directly in its track lay a young woman in evening dress, and apparently unconscious. The poster had attracted half the adult population of Mount Street to the theatre.

"Now I come to think of it," said the Doctor, "I remember something of this kind was visible in the photograph of the place which James sent me at Christmas. It represented a man throwing another man—or a woman, possibly a woman—out of a balloon. I suppose these dreadful pictures are changed every week?"

"Yes, something fresh every Monday," said Koko.

"Dear, dear me! To think of it!"

"It didn't matter to Jim," put in Koko; "he was rather amused by the posters."

"And who was the man who prevailed upon James to part with his walls in this philanthropic manner?" inquired the Doctor.

"A provision dealer called Harris."

At that moment Koko felt a touch on his arm, and wheeled round to find old Harris himself at his elbow.

"Mr Somers, sir, seeing you standin' 'ere, I've come to ask after the doctor. All Mount Street wants to know 'ow 'e is. Is he like to die?"

"There is hope, but not much. You know yourself how badly he was knocked about."

"Yes, I know that. Yes, and I pretty near screwed that 'unchback's 'ead orf, so 'elp me!" returned the provision dealer, with a savage chuckle.

"Are you the man mentioned in the newspapers as having fetched the police?" Dr Mortimer demanded of Mr Harris.

"Yes, I'm the man," was the answer—"I fetched 'em. You see, last night I goes into Dr Mortimer's surgery and sallows vot I took for prussic acid. Yes, 'arf a pint. And vile I vos vaitin' for the end, I fell asleep, and ven I vakes the doctor vos standin' by me. Vell, 'e tells me it vosn't p'ison, and then 'e goes orf to Pine

Court. Vell, just after, in comes Mr Somers, and says 'e: 'Vare is the doctor?' an' I says: "E's gone to vare it mentions in that bit of paper." 'Pine Court,' says Mr Somers. 'Mrs Murphy's.' 'Mrs Murphy don't live in Pine Court,' says I. 'I knows all the people in these courts.' Mr Somers 'e looks startled, and reads the note again. 'This looks fishy, 'Arris,' he says; 'this writin's in a disguised 'and.' I gets up and looks at the note, and I sees at once it vos my son Isaac's 'andwritin'—"

"Your son's!" exclaimed Dr Mortimer. "Do the police know that?"

"They don't," replied Mr Harris; "and for vy? Vy, for becos I says to Mr Somers: 'This is a trap; I says, 'and ve'll be after the doctor and save 'im. But I'll 'elp you on one condition only.' 'Vot's that?' says Mr Somers, sharp like. 'That you don't split on Isaac! You agree to that, an' I'll lend you this revolver!' I vos goin' to shoot myself at first, you see, sir, an' then I thought p'ison would be cleaner. 'Agreed,' says Mr Somers, and off ve goes, I to fetch the police and Mr Somers straight for Pine Court, vith the loaded revolver in 'is pocket."

"And this scoundrel of a son of yours—where is he?" demanded the Doctor. The old man laughed softly to himself.

"My son Isaac? 'E's *bolted!* 'E vent at once—vithout a vord. I says: 'Isaac,' I says, 'you wrote that note. You're in my power. You'll 'ang if I put up my little finger!' And Isaac, 'e just vent right out of the door vithout even puttin' on 'is 'at! 'E von't trouble me no more, but 'e'll always get a livin'. 'E's clever as paint, is Isaac! Yes, 'e vent out like that—never saw a man go out of a 'ouse so quick in my life. So I've altered the name over my shop back to 'Arris & Son—there's the painter just finishin'—and now I'm my own master agen."

And the old dealer snapped his lean fingers for sheer joy.

"Why 'Harris & Son,' if your son has run away for good?" asked Dr Mortimer.

"Becos 'Arris by itself vould cause remark. If anyone says: 'Vare's your son, Mr 'Arris?' I shall say, 'E's *gone away for 'is 'ealth,*' and that'll 'ave to satisfy 'em."

And with a leer of the utmost self-complacency Mr Harris saluted his two listeners, and went back to watch the painter conclude the alteration in the title over the provision shop.

Mrs Brown, Jim's caretaker, was in, and admitted Koko and his companion. The old doctor gazed silently round the surgery. There was Jim's working coat, there was his pipe-rack, there was the quaint Chinaman whose sudden fall forwards—ingeniously contrived by the Long 'Un—used to announce the opening of the street door.

"I should never have thought," murmured the Doctor, "that Jim would have

settled down in a place like this.”

”He did settle down, though,” said Koko, ”and he was working it up into a good thing when this horrible plot was laid for him.”

”We must keep it going, then,” said the Doctor. ”Do you suppose any of his friends at the hospital would be willing to act in his place?”

”Sure of it,” said Koko. ”I think you had better ask Evans—a red-headed man—and Deadwood. They are both friends of Jim’s.”

”I’ll go and see them at once,” said the Doctor, ”and then I must get back to Threeways. I have some patients I cannot leave for long.”

”What about the hoarding?” asked Koko.

”Well,” said the Doctor, ”considering the service Mr Harris rendered last night, I think we ought to let him continue to make money out of Jim’s walls.”

And so, thereafter, each Monday saw a fresh pictorial embellishment of the surgery’s exterior; every Monday the youth of Mount Street was thrilled to the marrow by new scenes of derringdo of lovely ladies in peril and gallant gentlemen dashing to their assistance, and of virtue triumphing over vice, as always virtue will do so long as there remain in the world good women and honourable men.

And the transpontine drama reaped many sixpences thereby.

CHAPTER XXX. THE WEEK PASSES.

True to the prognostication of the great Trefusis, Jim Mortimer remained unconscious for seven days. During that time, liquid food—beef extract and milk—was poured down his throat, and thus the lamp of his life was kept alight. At the end of the week, Jim, emaciated and hollow-cheeked, opened his eyes, and the first person he caught sight of and addressed was, appropriately enough, his friend George Somers.

”Well, young feller!” he said, with a brave attempt to smile in his old, cheery way.

Koko took his hand and pressed it gently.

”You must get well quick now, Jim, old boy.”

”It isn’t in me,” said Jim.

”But you must. Oh, Jim, please buck up and get well!”

Jim tried to shake his head, and the agonising pain which this slight action

caused him brought the perspiration out on his face.

"I'm too far gone, dear old chap," he murmured. "I know it."

Koko gently bathed his friend's damp face with a sponge dipped in some cool, soothing lotion. His touch was as soft as a woman's. The trained nurse, when she went out for her daily ride on the top of a 'bus, knew that she was leaving her patient in good hands when she left him with Koko.

"That's great," muttered Jim, and fell into a doze.

As Koko kept watch by his chum's bedside, his kindly brown eyes became dim and misty. Could it be that he was to lose Jim after all? he wondered. Oh no, that could not be! Surely this great, honest fellow would be spared! He was so young—hardly more than a boy—and had lived such a little time.

Surely, thought Koko, in his simple faith, God would take that into consideration. *He* would remember how young Jim was, and remember, too, that in spite of all the knocking about and drinking and ragging he had done, Jim had never once been guilty of a dishonourable action. He had lived a clean life, and such errors of conduct as he had been guilty of had been due rather to his careless, happy-go-lucky nature than to vicious inclination. He had knocked policemen down and painted the town blue, but he had been a gentleman through it all. The policemen always seemed to feel that, apart from the apologies and sovereigns he had subsequently applied to their bruises as healing balm of a practical kind.

The matter with Jim had been—until a few months since—that he had always had too liberal a supply of pocket money to draw upon down at Three-ways. Consequently, unscrupulous fellow-students had borrowed from him and never troubled to repay him; consequently, it was always Jim who stood treat; consequently, he had got into disgrace and earned the penalty of banishment.

Such were Koko's sad reflections as he sat by the sick-bed. Presently he looked at his watch, and discovered that he had just forty minutes in which to get his bag from his rooms in the Adelphi, and then catch a north-going express. For that night he was due to referee at a glove fight, at Gateshead, between Micky Brown, the Northumberland middle-weight champion, and Jake Morris, of Bethnal Green. He had also to wire a half-column report of the fight to the *Sporting Mail*.

So he had, perforce, to leave Jim, not knowing whether he would ever see him alive again. For Trefusis had said that the forty-eight hours following Mortimer's return to consciousness would decide his fate.

Jim was still dozing. One of his hands lay limply on the coverlet of the bed. Koko laid his right hand upon it and gazed at the white face and the boyish, close-clipped head in its snowy bandages.

"Good-bye, Jim!" he murmured, and went softly round to the door. He expected the nurse back about this time. If she had not come in he would have

to ask Miss Bird to sit with Jim, as Miss Bird had already taken turns with Koko, Mr Maybury, and the trained nurse in sick-room duty.

Koko was looking back for the last time at the still form of his friend, the sadness of his heart showing very visibly in his face, when the handle was turned and the trained nurse came in, fresh and rosy from her ride in the keen air. She was a bonny Scotswoman—quite a little thing—with blue eyes and flaxen hair.

"Are you going so soon, Mr Somers?" she said.

"Yes, I haven't a moment to lose. I have to catch a train for Newcastle."

A third person, watching the two faces, would have noticed a shadow of disappointment fall across the little nurse's pretty face. A third person—such as Miss Bird or Dora—would possibly have deduced a certain fact from this shadow. And a third person, watching Koko and Jim's nurse clasp hands in bidding each other good-bye, would have smiled to herself and looked another way, for it would seem that the parting of these two was not without a touch of feeling which had nothing whatever platonic about it.

Well, Koko caught his train, and ten hours later was the central figure of an almost indescribable inferno. For, as neither man had been knocked out in the twenty rounds to which the contest was limited, Koko, according to rule, had awarded the fight to the London man "on points." Whereupon had arisen such a hurricane of yells and oaths from the miners and shipwrights with which the hall was crammed, that a man with less pluck might well have been appalled. But the little bald-headed reporter from London stood his ground, and looked calmly upon the infuriated faces and forest of horny fists that surrounded the ring.

"Jake Morris wins," he said again, during a lull in the storm, "on points."

And again the miners—most of whom had money on the local pet—howled like wolves.

The police inspector standing near Koko whispered a warning.

"Go out by the extra exit," he said; "they won't be looking for you there."

Koko, without looking round, nodded, and, having made certain necessary entries in his note-book, took the inspector's hint, and made such good time over the high level bridge into Newcastle that he was safe in the smoking-room of his hotel while a mass of drink-inflamed Northumbrians were still awaiting his appearance at the stage door.

From the sick-room to this scene of unbridled brute passions—a change indeed! But Koko took it coolly, as part of the day's work—sent off his report, snapped up some supper, and went to bed, and by eight next morning was speeding back to London and Jim, with a sixpenny novel—upside down on his knees.

During these seven days, events had been treading quickly on each other's heels.

Harold Jefferson, knowing perfectly well that Mr Maybury thoroughly intended that he should be taken at his word with regard to the marriage, had not attempted to see Dora. As a matter of fact, he had entertained doubts for some time past with regard to Dora's affection for himself, and her father's unexpected call at the Albany that night had made it doubly plain to the young stockbroker that Dora Maybury, even though she might be prevailed upon eventually to marry him, was not likely ever to prove a very affectionate wife.

So Jefferson, instead of putting on his wedding clothes, informed his best man (the only guest invited on his side) that the marriage had been postponed owing to an illness in Dora's family, and that he (Jefferson) was off to Nice.

To Nice, therefore, he went, expecting to meet his father there and explain the situation to him. But, unfortunately for this plan, Jefferson senior made up his mind that very day to cut his visit short and return to London.

Two days after the date fixed for the wedding, therefore, Mr Jefferson arrived at his office in Cornhill to find that his cashier had been run over and seriously injured by an omnibus, and also that he was a book-keeper short, "Mr Harold," before his departure for Nice, having notified the manager to the effect that Mr Maybury had decided to relinquish his post in the firm. "Mr Harold" gave no reasons—he simply stated the fact. The manager therefore presumed that Mr Maybury had obtained a better job.

So far from having secured a more lucrative post, Mr Maybury had been a prey to considerable anxiety. Being his wife's property, he had no rent to pay for No. 9 Derby Crescent, and so he was always certain of having a roof over his head. The weekly sums paid by Miss Bird, Mr Cleave, and Jim went into his wife's pocket for housekeeping purposes. Out of the princely salary of £150 a year which he had received from the Jeffersons, Mr Maybury had had to pay rates and taxes, defray Frank's schooling expenses, and contribute towards his family's clothing bill. It will therefore be readily comprehended that he himself was not able to indulge in a very sumptuous midday meal, or pander to his own modest wants in any but a most economical manner.

When, therefore, the ex-merchant explained to his wife that he was no longer employed by the Jeffersons, and why, such a shower of vicious invective descended upon his unfortunate head that he felt strongly inclined to take a steerage passage to the States and there endeavour—with his extensive knowledge of the cotton trade—to retrieve his fallen fortunes. He was, in point of fact, actually looking through the shipping advertisements with the laudable object of finding the cheapest line by which it was possible to cross the Atlantic, when he received a wire from Jefferson senior desiring him to attend at the office with the least possible delay. When he returned in the evening, Mr Maybury informed his wife that Mr Jefferson had appointed him cashier to the firm at a salary of

£300 per annum, *vice* the gentleman who had been run over by the omnibus, whose injuries, it appeared, had proved so serious that Mr Jefferson had decided to pension him off.

"And what did Mr Jefferson say about Dora?" inquired Mrs Maybury, when she at length came to the end of her eloquent expressions of satisfaction.

"He said," replied Dora's father, "when I had explained the circumstances to him, that he considered I had acted quite rightly."

"And Harold?"

"Will stay at Nice till the spring."

Thus did the wheel of Fortune, in its strange revolutions, bring Mr Maybury once more a modest sufficiency of Income. He had not hesitated a moment in accepting the vacant post and the additional salary, for he knew that he was quite capable of doing the work, and that he would not be receiving a penny too much for the responsibility and the trouble his new duties would involve.

"I think," said Mr Maybury, just before he and his good lady fell asleep that night, "that we might now engage a cook. H. R. deserves a rest."

"Very well, dear," said Mrs Maybury, quite amicably.

"And then, as to Miss Bird and Mr Cleave—"

"Oh, they had better stay on," interrupted Mrs Maybury; "three hundred a year, though magnificent compared to what you have been getting, is not a very great income. Miss Bird and Mr Cleave will still be a great help."

"I have altered my opinion about Miss Bird," said Mr Maybury; "I am beginning to like her."

"And do you still consider Mr Cleave an 'old woman'?" inquired Mrs Maybury.

"I do," said Mr Maybury—"an older woman than ever. If he wants to go, I shan't beg him to stop."

Curiously enough, within a few days Mr Cleave put Mr Maybury's declaration to the test. For, on the day Jim recovered consciousness, Mr Cleave informed Mrs Maybury that he had decided to go and live with some relatives at Norwood. Mrs Maybury said that she should be sorry to part with Mr Cleave, but Mr Maybury preserved a discreet silence on the point.

And it fell out in this wise.

Mr Cleave had always admired Dora, and had always exerted himself to be agreeable to her. When, therefore, Dora's engagement with Harold Jefferson was broken off, Mr Cleave began to pay a large amount of attention to his appearance. He bought some new made-up ties and some new collars of the latest shape; also, he had his hair cut, and purchased a new pair of button-up boots.

At all meals, thenceforth, he engaged Dora in sprightly conversation, and one day, meeting her alone in the drawing-room, he handed her a book.

"A little present, Miss Dora," he said.

"Oh, thank you, Mr Cleave," said Dora, politely.

On examining the work, Dora found it to consist of *The Total Abstainer* for the past six months, bound up in a green cover. Glancing casually through it, she suddenly came across a passage heavily marked with a blue pencil. The page on which the passage occurred was headed "Our Pillory," and directly Dora's eye fell on the paragraph she recognised it as an old friend.

"A piteous example of what over-indulgence in alcohol may bring a man to (*ran the paragraph*) was afforded by a case which came before our notice one day last week in the Kensington Police Court. The degraded being who faced the magistrate with an unabashed gaze was a young doctor named Mortimer--"

Oh yes! Dora *well* remembered a certain evening in September when Mr Cleave read this out to the assembled company in the drawing-room.

"Do you know, Mr Cleave," she said, sweetly, "I am afraid this book will be *rather* thrown away on me. *I don't drink--*"

"There are some excellent tales illustrating the evils--" Cleave was protesting, when Dora interrupted him.

"Yes, but they are hardly the kind of tales girls care to read. It is very kind of you to give me this volume, but I feel you could bestow it better elsewhere."

"As you like--as you like," said Cleave, looking much offended.

"But," said Dora, producing a tiny pair of scissors from her chatelaine, "there is one paragraph I should like to cut out, if you don't mind. This one, look..."

Mr Cleave looked--and turned pale. He had entirely forgotten having marked that report of Jim's wrong-doing.

"You see," explained Dora, a bright flush irradiating her face, which had been very wan and pensive all this week of dire suspense, "I take a great interest in the--the person this paragraph is about."

Then she quickly snipped the paragraph out and put it safely away in her purse.

"Thank you so much, Mr Cleave," she said, handing back the volume.

And so Mr Cleave, after giving the matter due reflection, decided that he couldn't do better than go to live with his relatives at Norwood. He had always

fancied that they didn't understand him at No. 9. He felt quite sure about it now.

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT THE BEARDED MAN HAD MADE ANOTHER MISTAKE.

Mr Evans Evans, of the red hair, and Mr Deadwood, the truculent and filibustering, having recently (after an eight or nine years' struggle) obtained their qualification, accepted Dr Mortimer's invitation with alacrity. Yes—certainly they would look after the Long 'Un's practice. Only too pleased. Start at once and share proceeds? Right O!

They were both capable men, and so they found it quite within their power to cope with the work in Mount Street and its environments. True, Mr Evans did the brunt of the work, but Mr Deadwood had his uses.

For, taking into consideration the manner in which the Long 'Un and his predecessor had been handled by the Hooligans of the neighbourhood, Mr Deadwood, after due thought, decided that the thing was to take a strong line with such roughs as might assume a hostile, or even an impertinent, attitude towards himself and his colleague. There were still a good many Hooligans about, and the colour of Mr Evans's hair provoked a variety of rude jests from a group of them on the afternoon of the day Messrs Evans and Deadwood started operations in this district.

The first guffaw had hardly sounded out upon the raw February air when Mr Evans smote the nearest humorist on his nose, and Mr Deadwood knocked the principal guffawer's head against the wall that was supporting his idle form. The other Hooligans objecting to this species of rebuke, a spirited free fight was soon in progress. But, after Covent Garden porters, Mr Deadwood found the weedy louts of Mount Street comparatively mild customers to tackle, and he laid about him with such energy that the group of Hooligans soon decamped with many oaths and much gnashing of such teeth as Jim's deputy had left in their gums.

In brief, Mr Deadwood, who had been a scrapper from his birth, and who had only been knocked out in fair fight once in his life—his opponent on that occasion being James Mortimer—established what is called a "funk" in Mount Street, for, after his primary bout with the Hooligans, the mere sight of his great

shoulders and bull-dog jaw caused such law-breaking vagabonds as he might meet in the course of his rounds to slink off rapidly down dark alleys and tortuous byways in order to avoid him.

"The fact is," said Mr Deadwood one day, "Jim was much too gentle with these chaps. He didn't hurt 'em enough. By George! when I think how he was served, I feel inclined to go for every pub-propper-up I meet."

And indeed, Mr Deadwood's countenance wore such a pugilistic expression whenever he walked abroad—which was a good many times daily—that the local Hooligans began to decamp to less perilous quarters, and Mount Street in time came to be quite a respectable thoroughfare for those parts.

Occasionally Messrs Evans and Deadwood, having finished their day's work, would go to see Jim. The little Scottish nurse took care that they did not talk very much, and so the partners found their visits to No. 9 hardly what one would call lively excursions, though it is true they took a certain pleasure in calling there, for Mr Evans quickly came to the conclusion that the trained nurse was "a nice little thing," while Mr Deadwood, after talking to Dora, would fall into a strangely sentimental and melancholy mood. A few pints of bitter ale, however, served to dispel his gloom in the long run, and then he would hie forth and search for Hooligans, and the latter had a bad time if he happened to find them.

One evening, when the partners called at No. 9, they were told that they couldn't see Jim, as Dr Trefusis and Sir Savile Smart were with him. Mr Evans therefore challenged Miss Bird to a game of draughts, and Mr Deadwood favoured Dora and Frank with a lurid account of the various battles he had fought during his hospital career. It was not an improving discourse, and as a consequence of it Frank came home the next day with a black eye, the result of having engaged a much larger boy than himself in fistic combat.

The outcome of the specialists' conversation with Messrs Evans and Deadwood, after a rigorous examination of Jim's injuries, was that Mr Deadwood called on the bearded man when the latter was discussing tea and crumpets on the following afternoon.

"Oh, how do you do?" said the bearded man rather stiffly, as he rose from the table.

He had observed the arrival of the partners in Mount Street with some misgivings, for he recognised them as members of the Matt's band that laid waste his surgery. He did not go out of his way to renew his acquaintance with them, and trusted they would not take the initiative in that respect. However, in view of the ferocious character his patients had given Mr Deadwood, he thought it would be as well to be polite to him.

"Don't let me disturb you," said Mr Deadwood; "I have only dropped in to tell you, in the plainest way the mind of man is capable of conceiving, that you

are an ass!"

"What reason have you for saying this?" demanded the bearded man, coldly.

"In the sublimity of your ignorance," explained Mr Deadwood, "added to your coruscatingly conceited idea that you know anything whatever about the human frame, you informed a sporting gentleman of my acquaintance that Jim Mortimer would only last twenty-four hours."

"Yes," said the bearded man, "I said that, and I meant it. Is he still alive?"

"Man, man!" exclaimed Mr Deadwood, "it hurts me to think that you come from Matt's—a place that has bred many eminent surgeons, including myself and my friend of the carmine tresses."

"Is Mortimer still alive, then?" reiterated the bearded man.

"He is so alive," returned Mr Deadwood, "that Trefusis says he will be playing cricket in June! Wherefore, what price *your* diagnosis of his hurts, my whiskered fakir?"

"I am surprised to hear it," said he of the beard.

"Of course you are," exclaimed Mr Deadwood, "and why? Because you are an ass. Sir, you ought to take a job on an Australian liner. You would find little to do except consume meals and inhale ozone. Going out, possibly there would be a few sick infants, and a gentleman afflicted with what is politely called the 'drink habit'! You would help the latter on his way to a watery grave, and no one would mind. Coming home, you might pick up a soldier from Egypt with dog-bite, bound for the Pasteur Institute. You would cut off his leg and think you had cured him. So why not get a liner job, my hairy false prophet?"

"Please moderate your language!" exclaimed the bearded man, shortly.

"Tut! tut! Go to!" replied Mr Deadwood; "I am only giving you these hints for your good. You ought not to doctor human beings, bar pirates or Esquimaux. Why not turn vet. and specialise in elephants? They take a lot of killing."

"I think you are very rude," protested the bearded man.

"Pulling out horses' teeth isn't a bad-paying business, either," continued Mr Deadwood. "You use forceps about as large as tongs. They would just suit your delicate touch."

"Everybody is liable to make mistakes," pleaded the bearded one.

"But when a man practising medicine makes the mistakes you do," returned Mr Deadwood, "he had better set up at once as secret agent—on a liberal salary—to a necropolis company."

But the bearded man was only half-listening to his visitor.

"I can't understand it," he muttered; "he was frightfully injured."

"But he's frightfully tough," rejoined Deadwood: "footer, rowing, cricket—all good for the spine. He'll get well! Ahem! Sorry to have to suggest it myself,

but have you got any tea to give away to a thirsty apothecary?"

"Certainly. Sit down and have a cup."

"I will," said Mr Deadwood. "As I have previously remarked, you're not a bad sort. After all, you can't help being an ass. *You* condemned Jim to death, and Trefusis has reprieved him. Two lumps and plenty of milk, and the toast is—JIM!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN WHICH TWO PEOPLE SET OUT UPON A JOURNEY.

The Long 'Un lay staring at the wall-paper. How often had he counted that design! Above the window it was repeated seventeen times—over and over again he counted the pattern to make sure it was repeated seventeen times—eight each side and one odd one in the middle. And again underneath and along each wall ran the design in serried and monotonous rows. He knew every bend and turn of it by heart. It represented a herb or flower of some kind, the like of which never was seen by mortal eye in garden, forest, field, or dell.

Almost unceasingly Jim had gazed on this stiff unnatural growth since he had regained consciousness. He had nothing else to do. He didn't want to talk, and he wasn't encouraged to. All he could do was lie there and stare at the wall-paper.

And when he was not counting the wall-paper pattern he would close his eyes and picture Dora to himself. He would think of her in the neat coat and skirt she wore to the post-office and back; then simply in the blouse and skirt she dressed in "for the house"; then in the white frock she donned when bound for any entertainment in Jefferson's company. On the whole, Jim most liked to dream of her in the blouse and skirt. He had seen her thus attired most frequently; such was her costume when he first set eyes on her in the A B C shop that memorable August afternoon.

And so he lay with his head in white bandages and his back in plaster-of-Paris—not able to sit up or to turn even; so he lay and gazed upon the pictures of Dora that floated before his mind's eye.

They had not told him that no marriage had taken place. The matter had been delicately mentioned to the two great surgeons by Mr Maybury, but they had both set their faces against the idea of saying anything to Jim about it, Trefusis declaring that it would excite his patient too much.

Sir Savile concurring, Mr Maybury was obliged to submit, although he himself could not help thinking that the intelligence would banish that brooding expression for ever from Jim's eyes. For Dora's father sitting by the bedside, could see that Jim was suffering from something more than the physical injuries he had sustained in the Silent House.

Mr Maybury spoke to Koko about it.

"Yes," said Koko, promptly; "I have a good mind to tell Jim, and let the doctors go hang. They only take a scientific view of his case. *Shall I?*"

"We must obey orders," said Mr Maybury.

"Well I don't believe it would do him all that harm—and it might do him an awful lot of good."

"I think with you," said Mr Maybury, "but the doctors probably know best."

"All the same, doctors don't know everything," grumbled Koko.

Jim did not make a single inquiry on the subject. He presumed Dora was away honey-mooning under the fair blue skies of the Mediterranean. He had no idea she was still at No. 9, seriously considering the question of taking a business situation of some sort, since she could not return to the post-office. Her father did not encourage the idea, nor did he oppose it. If Dora would be happier going to a city office every day, well—she had better go. But, on the other hand, he was quite content that she should remain at home, now that he was so much better off.

So stood matters when old Doctor Mortimer stole a couple of days from his wealthy and, in many cases, hypochondriacal patients down at Threeways, and, running up to town to see Jim, pitched his tent in a quiet Arundel Street hotel. In order to reach Mount Street he had only to make his way along the Embankment to Blackfriars Bridge, whence to Derby Crescent was a smart fifteen minutes' walk. For the Doctor always walked if it was fine weather. "It keeps a man alive—walking," the old gentleman told Koko, who lunched with him on the day of his arrival in town. And, to be sure, it was good to see the Doctor's stalwart form striding briskly along the crowded pavements, his fine, clean-cut face ruddy and wholesome showing up refreshingly against the pallid cheeks of London wayfarers.

"We must get Jim away to the seaside as soon as possible," he said to Koko, as the latter with some difficulty kept step for step with his big companion; "what he wants is oxygen—oxygen."

During lunch Koko had given Jim's grandfather a complete history of the Jefferson episode. He also mentioned that Jim was being kept in ignorance of the closing incident. So, after a short silence, Dr Mortimer slackened his pace, and said: "She's a nice girl, then, Mr Somers?"

"She's as nice a girl as you could meet, Doctor."

"Doesn't spend all her time reading silly novels, I trust?"

"Hardly *all* her time, Doctor. She reads a certain number, I suppose."

"She's a good girl—I mean, a girl with religion? I don't believe in your modern young lady who strums waltzes on the piano instead of going to church!"

"Nor do I," said Koko. "Yes," he added, "she's a good girl. She's been looking after the poor flower-seller who saved Jim's face from the Hooligan's boot."

"And so,"—the Doctor slackened his pace still more,— "and so, if we manage to pull Jim round and make him as strong a man as he ever was, you think this girl will marry him?"

"I'm sure of it," said Koko.

"And you're sure this is no passing fancy of Jim's? You think he will want to marry her?"

"I'd stake my life on it," cried Koko.

"Then," said the Doctor, "the very best medicine the boy can have is a daily visit from Miss—er—"

"Dora," supplied Koko.

"From Miss Dora Maybury," added the Doctor, emphatically. "Very good. I'll take the responsibility of the matter on my own shoulders. He shall see her."

Jim was staring at that abominable wall-paper pattern without coming to any decision about the number of times it was repeated over the window. For in every leaf he saw Dora's face—and very soon he would see Dora herself, for he knew now that she hadn't married Jefferson, and that she was coming to tea with him this very day. It was to be, in fact, quite a tea-party—a small one, and a very select one. The little Scottish nurse, who was all-powerful in the sick-room—and had made this fact very clear to everybody by this time—would act as hostess, and the guests would be strictly limited to Jim's grandfather, Koko, and Dora. It would not do, said the nurse, firmly to have too many people to tea, and the party must only last half an hour at the outside. Another day she would invite Mr and Mrs Maybury, Miss Bird and Frank—but they must not come to-day; it would be too many for the little room.

So now Jim was feeling very happy. He and his grandfather had "made it up" completely. In fact Jim had been astonished by the change that had come over the old gentleman. True, the abrupt manner of speech remained, but behind it was a new gentleness, and a new understanding of Jim.

So they had shaken hands, and the Doctor was now downstairs talking to Koko and Dora.

[Transcriber's notes:

The last page of this book was missing, however, it can be assumed that there was a happy ending.

The source book was in poor condition. Its title page mentions sixteen illustrations, only seven of which were still in the book.]

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JIM MORTIMER ***

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