



FROM A SURGEON'S DIARY.

BY CLIFFORD ASHDOWN,
AUTHOR OF "THE ADVENTURES OF ROMNEY PRINGLE."

HOW I CURED A HOPELESS PARALYTIC.

A COMPLETE STORY.



USED to think some years ago that I was tolerably proof against most infections, including that of influenza, but I suppose I had got into a "receptive condition," for I had not been long back in my rooms after my last engagement before I began to feel a most unmistakable seediness. My old friend Nosbury, whom I consulted, in a kindly-meant effort to relieve my depression was inclined to put the symptoms down to over-smoking; but when he took my temperature and caught a glimpse of that blankety tongue he sent me to bed straight-away, and there I stayed for a fortnight on end. There was nothing special about the attack; it ran its usual course, but as a result of a month's enforced idleness, to say nothing of the incidental expenses, I found I had made a larger hole in my small capital than I was able to contemplate unmoved. Just in the nick of time, and when I was thinking of spending a few pounds more on a recruiting trip to Brighton, Adamson (that prince of agents!) offered me the charge of a practice in the New Forest, which he described as "small and easy," and I was only too glad to take it, small and easy as the fee might also prove.

When I got down to Rougholt I found that Adamson's expression was not a mere epigram. Dr. Wild was a man of some means, and appeared to practise more for

the sake of an occupation than anything else. He was an active member of the Alpine Club, and I barely saw him before he was off to Switzerland for his holiday. Personally, I am of that not inconsiderable class in whom altitudes create a horrid sensation of fear and discomfort, and I was unable to understand why a man who appeared to enjoy so many of the good things of life should risk his neck among the gulfs and precipices whose photographs covered the walls of nearly every room in the house. Mrs. Wild, who was an equally expert Alpinist, accompanied her husband, and as they had no family I was left practically master of the house—a state of things in which, judging by past experience, the advantages and disadvantages were about equally balanced.

The work, when I had once got used to it, proved to be so light that I began to look on it as an agreeable opportunity for getting up my strength for more serious work, although, as matters turned out it was by no means a sinecure. But the chief attraction of the place (I may as well say so at once) was that Rougholt lay an easy cycle-ride from Southampton, where I knew Mrs. Innes had taken a house. I had seen very little of the Innes family in town, my wretched illness being responsible for much; but I had seen enough to convince me that Louise was the one woman on earth for me, and it was only the uncertainty of my position which kept me from telling her in

so many words what feminine intuition must have enabled her to see long ago.

As I said, the work to begin with was very light, the patients being mostly old chronic cases who only needed visiting at regular intervals, but there was one who interested me more from the surrounding circumstances than from any inherent attraction of his disease. Artlett had been a labourer in the service of a neighbouring landowner, and about eighteen months before I made his acquaintance he had received some kind of injury to his back while working a steam-plough. There seemed little amiss with him at first, so I gathered, but he had gradually developed a paralysis of the lower limbs, and now was hopelessly bed-ridden. His master was locally known as "a hard man," and Artlett, without waiting to see what might be done for his relief, seemed to have jumped to the conclusion that there was nothing before him but the workhouse. Partly influenced by friends, but chiefly by the unscrupulous advice of a shady Southampton solicitor, he took proceedings under the Employers' Liability Act, and although the case was not at all a clear one, and in spite of adverse medical evidence, he had ended in scoring off his old master to the tune of a pound a week. Of his employer of course I knew nothing, but I was disgusted by the way in which Artlett plumed himself on his astuteness as with true rustic cunning he told the story. The judge, he was a prime one, he was; *he* wouldn't let the doctor say there was nothing the matter with him; *he* stood up for the working-man, he did—bless him! Such, or something like it, with additions, was the gist of his pæan, and after a few visits I knew it well enough to repeat backwards. I am sure that had his late master heard but a little of what was dinned into my ears there would have been a drying-up of the stream of comforts with which, for all his "hardness," he kept Artlett supplied. Not a day passed without something arriving from "the Hall." Jellies, soups, custards, now a chicken, then a small joint: Artlett's *menu* must have been the most luxurious in any cottage in the country. So far as cooking was concerned, Artlett's daughter had a sinecure which she fully appreciated, as I hardly ever found her at home, while her father was always whining about her "gaddings out," and grimly prophesying as to the fate in store for a girl with too many strings to her bow. As a widower, no doubt he felt this neglect of his

sole companion, and for this reason I visited him more often than perhaps was necessary, although I soon wished that he had had another topic of conversation than his County Court suit, even though it had been the great event of his life.

With absolutely none of the minor troubles which assail the paralysed, Artlett was, on the whole, a very healthy man, were it not for a chronic dyspepsia, which I put down to the endless procession of dainties from the Hall. I was not sorry to find in him something that I could treat, for his paralysis was quite hopeless, and he was fond of reciting in self-pity that "physicians were in vain," and some other things that might in consequence be anticipated. But it was not long before his symptoms began to puzzle me. I had been attending him about a week when he drew my attention one morning to what he called "a new paralis," and truly he had some loss of power in the right wrist which he was unable to straighten. He seemed much upset about it, and inclined to ascribe it to a spreading of the original injury, but that I knew to be very unlikely; besides, this new trouble made me suspect something totally different. I took the opportunity of thoroughly overhauling him, and was not very much surprised to detect a blue line round the gums. To save time, I may as well say that the symptoms pointed to chronic lead-poisoning; most people nowadays know that this is a very common disease, and a few years ago, when leaden vessels were more extensively used, it was even commoner than at present. The principal signs are chronic indigestion with a bluish line round the gums and a paralysis of the extending muscles of the forearm leading to the "drop-wrist," which is so characteristic of the disease: and all these I found present in Artlett. As a principal cause of the poisoning is water conveyed in lead-pipes, I questioned him as to the water-supply, but found that it all came from a deep well, and when I had a look round the premises later on I saw no reason to suspect either the well or the wooden bucket which was used in it. Besides, Artlett was not a water-drinker, and, as I have already hinted, little or no water was required for cooking. So I tried to cheer him as much as possible, and when I got home prescribed the usual remedies for the case.

When I saw him the next day Artlett was very depressed. He appeared to resent the fact of his being no better, although of

course it was absurd to expect any immediate change. However, as he had given me a taste of his quality, I knew it behoved me to be very circumspect, and, without telling him the real nature of the case, I inquired very carefully into his habits and way of living. He stared somewhat when I expressed a wish to take samples of his food away with me, although with rustic caution he said little. I told him a yarn I had concocted about the treatment of chronic dyspepsia, and endeavoured to explain the process of digestion; but he evidently understood little that I said, although he appeared greatly impressed. In the end I requisitioned all the empty medicine bottles I could find, and stowed quite a number of samples of food and drink, not forgetting some water from the well, under the seat of the dog-cart, for I was not cycling that day, having a longer round than usual.

The next morning I was sent for in quite another direction, and in the afternoon I had to do what I should have otherwise done in the morning, so that I was unable to work round to Artlett until the evening. A little way from the house his daughter met me (she was at home, for a wonder), and told me a curious piece of news. Her father appeared to have been much upset by my proceedings of the day before. She had found him behaving more like a madman than anything else—had been quite afraid to remain in the house with him; he had been abusing doctors and everyone, so she didn't think it would be safe for me to see him; refused all food, and had eaten nothing since yesterday but some bread and milk she had made for him herself; when she offered him some fish from the Hall, the same as he used to be so fond of, he had thrown it in the fire, using "dreadful language." I was very interested in this new development; it was not long before that I had read of insanity arising as a result of lead-poisoning. I endeavoured to calm the daughter's fears, and promised to be as soothing as I knew with the patient. When I got into the room I could see little outward change, and Artlett greeted me very much as usual. I talked on indifferent matters as long as possible, but it was inevitable that the subject which was occupying both our minds should crop up sooner or later.

"Look here, doctor," he suddenly burst out. "I wants to speak to yer like a man. Yes, yes! I know what ye're going to say,

but I want yer to answer me like a man. There's something going on I don't understand."

"I don't suppose you do, Artlett, but——"

"It's not my trade, you're goin' to say, doctor. But it's your'n, and I pays yer to tell me!"

Now this was not only insulting but untrue, for his late employer was paying for the attendance; but I let it pass and merely said:

"Well, what is it you want to know? Don't excite yourself so. We shall never get any further to-night if you don't keep calm."

"About this 'ere paralis, then?"

"Well, I think you've been taking something that hasn't agreed with you."

"That's it! It's the bile on the brain; I feels it playin' on me more and more every day."

"What are you talking about, Artlett!"

"They're poisonin' of me! Rot 'em!"

"Poisoning you?"

"Ah, I knows all about it! Yer may shake yer 'ead, but yer knows too."

"I tell you, Artlett, I don't know what you mean."

"What did yer put in all them bottles, then, what yer took 'ome with yer?"

"Why, you saw what I put in them!"

"Ah, I knows! And what did yer find in 'em?"

"Nothing!" This was rather more than the truth, for, of course, I had had no time to analyse the samples.

"I knows better. 'E's poisonin' of me!"

"Who is? Once more, say what you mean and have done with it."

"Why, Mr. Kirtley, to be sure."

"You must be mad! Isn't he doing all he can to keep you alive, and paying you into the bargain?"

"That's it!" he roared. "'E wants ter stop a-payin' me as he's got to by law—County Court law. 'E wants ter get rid of me!"

I was so astounded that, unfortunately, the old fox saw my embarrassment.

"Well, yer knows it, doctor!" he cried.

"What did yer take all them things away for? All them victuals 'e sends me? Sech a kind gen'l'man as 'e is! Look at my pore 'and! 'E stole my legs, an' now 'e's stealin' my arms! 'E'll soon 'ave my life! Rot 'im!"

I noticed, with a good deal of interest, that his mental disturbance seemed to over-

come his physical helplessness, for his legs twitched violently under the bed-clothes as he swayed to and fro in his excitement. Presently he began to whimper, and I seized the opportunity to argue with him.

"Look here, Artlett," I said. "I'm quite sure that you're talking utter nonsense. Mr. Kirtley is far too rich a man to notice the loss of what he pays you, even if he were wicked enough to try and kill you; and as to that, it's simply absurd! But if you think so——"

"It's gospel-truth, an' yer knows it!"

"Well, well, let me finish. The thing for you to do is very simple. If you think you're being poisoned, don't take any food but what your daughter buys and cooks for you. Keep on with the medicine, and I'll send you a draught to quiet you down."

"I won't take no more physic! You're as bad as what 'e is!"

I could see it was waste of time to argue with him. With all the prejudice and suspicion of his class he seemed to consider his master quite capable of what he might probably have done himself had their positions been reversed. As I rode homeward I hardly knew what to make of it all. It would have been strange indeed if Artlett had stumbled on the true cause of his lead-poisoning. His ideas of foul play were, of course, ridiculous, but it was quite possible that he was being poisoned in all innocence: literally killed by kindness! It was clear that I must analyse those samples without loss of time.

Several things delayed me when I got back, but as soon as I had half-an-hour to spare I set to work and made the most exhaustive analysis possible with the limited appliances at hand. Fortunately, lead is a substance very easily detected by chemical tests, and although it was a tedious process away from an analyst's laboratory, by the time I had finished I felt satisfied I had left no stone unturned in my search. In a word, I was unable to find the slightest trace of lead in any of the food samples; all were of equal innocence, while the water, as I had expected, was above suspicion. I felt more puzzled than ever—indeed, the word feebly describes my state of mind as I surveyed the squad of bottles whose contents I had banned with such haste. As to the nature of Artlett's new complaint, there could be no question; I doubt if a junior student would have hesitated before giving a correct diagnosis; yet of the

origin of the disease I was absolutely ignorant.

When I visited Artlett the next day I found him more amenable to reason. For one thing, although his wrist was unaltered, his other symptoms were relieved—a fact which he attributed to his home-made diet, although I solemnly assured him he need have no dread of the delicacies from the Hall. As his daughter took occasion to inform me that she had persuaded him to continue my treatment, I got him to admit that I might possibly have done him some good, and with that I left him.

I now come to the curious experience which resulted in such an addition to the work at Rougholt. Two or three days afterwards I was called out to Stonewood, a village about four miles off. The patient was of the average type of agricultural labourer, deliberate of speech and slow of comprehension, his symptoms striking me as rather anomalous until I came to examine the mouth, and there found the familiar blue line, plain and unmistakable, around the gums. I could learn little that was of any use in deciding the origin of his trouble, so took a sample of the drinking water; it was from a cistern in this case. On getting home I tested for lead without result, and began to wonder whether the chemicals or my ignorance were responsible for my failure. When I visited the patient the next day his wife told me that I was wanted at another house in the village. This was the little general-store, and the proprietor gave me such an account of himself as led me to inspect his mouth also; there was the blue line in all its beauty, but, as before, I learned nothing to account for it, and finally returned with another sample of water. Of course, I could find no lead in it. By this time I was growing used to negative results of my analyses; but as the matter was becoming serious, I determined to take the samples with me to Southampton and see what a professional analyst could make of it. There were other reasons moving me to this expedition; but, honestly, Wild's chemicals were not above suspicion of antiquity and consequent inertia.

I had arranged the next morning's work with the idea of getting over to Southampton early. Artlett, though still convinced of the reality of the plot against him, alluded to it in a less actively volcanic style. Both in Artlett's case and that of the two Stonewood men, there was really little to be done until I had managed to discover the true source

of the lead-poisoning; and if anything cropped up to detain me I had thought of putting off the two latter visits till the afternoon, although Artlett I intended in any case to see early. I still have a vivid recollection of the intense disgust I felt when on coming down to breakfast I found waiting for me not one message only, but three—all from Stonewood, too, and all fresh cases! My trip to Southampton bade fair to be a mere ride to the analyst's and back again, if,

family likeness of his symptoms to those of the others in the village. He had been a fighting-man, I learned, and had lost all his teeth in early life, so there was little hospitality for the blue line on his gums; all the same, I felt certain that it ought to have been there, and, wondering what I should discover next, I went on to an agricultural labourer's cottage. He was a trifle more intelligent than the one I saw at first, who, by the way, lived next door to him. When I



" 'THERE'S SOMETHING GOING ON I DON'T UNDERSTAND ' ' (p. 565).

indeed, I ever got there at all. However, there was no help for it; the life of a medical man is one long string of self-denials! I recalled somewhat bitterly an old theory of mine: how much more essential to a doctor than a priest was a life of celibacy, the softer and more intimate relations of life being so constantly supplanted by the calls of professional duty, if not of humanity.

I packed my carrier with the samples I had accumulated in the last few days, and having assured Artlett (quite uselessly) that the murder plot had extended to Stonewood, I rode on there, and lost no time in visiting the first new patient. He was a blacksmith, and I was more than startled by the strong

came to examine him I was astounded to find all the familiar symptoms as well marked as in any of the others! I was speechless—a fact which, I afterwards learnt, had greatly impressed the patient, with whom my reputation for profound wisdom was established for all time.

Somehow or other, I managed to find my way through the village to the "Goose and Gridiron," whence the third message came. Here I saw the youth who was barman and general factotum of the little ale-house, kept by a widow. By this time I might have been excused had I regarded every ailment of the Stonewood men as a proof of lead-poisoning; but when the ostler commenced to talk of his

indigestion, his inability to pull the beer-engine or to move a barrel, and finally exhibited the nerveless droop of his wrist, I had no need of the blue line upon his gums to convince me that he, too, had succumbed to the prevailing malady. I had no faculty of amazement left now; never had I seen anything like it! The disease had assumed the proportions of an epidemic. I felt it was getting on my nerves, and that I must have a positive analysis of my specimens at once. And so, having taken a sample of the water from the "Goose and Gridiron," I looked in on the two old patients, and then rode on to Southampton with my carrier full of rattling bottles.

I lunched at the "Star" in High Street, and leaving the machine there, took my samples to the firm of wholesale druggists whom Wild dealt with. It was but a very simple analysis that was wanted, and I felt both pleased and vexed when they discovered no more than myself—pleased that my chemical knowledge had not grown rusty, and very much annoyed to be unrelieved of my incubus. This matter disposed of, I dawdled round until the conventional visiting hour.

From my first visit to the Innes's in London they had let me see very plainly that I was not their most unwelcome visitor; remembering all the circumstances of our acquaintance, it would have been a strange thing had I been otherwise. But I was for ever doubting whether this cordiality, on the part of Miss Innes, at least, was anything more than gratitude for past services, and whether I should imperil my footing in the house by any attempt to render it a more intimate one. And now, to-day, at Southampton, I was filled with new alarms. On a former visit I had met a certain Major Johnstone of the Army Medical Department (an excellent fellow, by the way), and finding him there again I must needs imagine all sorts of half-hidden familiarities between him and Louise, and so began to cordially detest him. But I was in love, and therefore to some extent irresponsible. I thought of salving my peace of mind by seeing my military friend out. But it was no good; and when Mrs. Innes spoke of asking him to witness some share transfers, I thought I discovered a possible hint, and rose to go, but this the elder lady would by no means hear of, and in a little time Louise and I were alone.

Why is it that when a man is most anxious

to shine he is pretty sure to make an ass of himself? Here was the opportunity I had long looked for. I had rehearsed the scene over and over again. Myself calm, manly, and with a certain melancholy dignity, laying my hand and (no) fortune at the feet of Louise; she timid, silent, and, of course, blushing, receiving my addresses in maidenly confusion. She would probably weep—at least the novelists seemed to say so; or was I anticipating, and did they only do it later on at the wedding? If tears arose the proper thing was to kiss them away, whereupon she would smile upon me, still bashfully, and then I should mount my horse (my cycle in this case), and at home pen the manifesto in which I should demand the daughter's hand from her mother. It all ran so smoothly when I was safely alone, but now—! My throat seemed parched, and my tongue dry; I wished I had never taken that sherry at lunch. My collar felt tight, too—strange I had never noticed it before! And, worst of all, my nose began to itch! This was horrible; to scratch it would spoil the situation for ever! How I wished Miss Innes would go away if only for a moment, so that I might get into fighting trim, so to speak. I suppose she noticed my embarrassment, for, tactful as ever, she made conversation. Dr. Johnstone was such a charming man (*confound him!*); an old friend of her father's and his executor (*good—that explained his frequent presence*); he had married a cousin of theirs (*blessings on him!*).

I was so delighted to hear this that I found my tongue again with the doltish remark, "Ah, I wondered why he was here so much!" Her eyes beneath her perfectly arched brows met mine with a look of calm inquiry; those wonderful dark eyes, fathomless abysses, as they had seemed the first time I saw her! What an impertinent fool I must seem! And, trying to better matters, I floundered dismally.

"No, I don't mean that! I thought—I mean I was afraid he was—Miss Innes, I want to tell you that you are always in my thoughts." My tongue felt like a thong of leather. Suddenly I remembered a sentence I had rehearsed often enough, and in a voice which I intended to be thrilling, but which was only sepulchral, went on: "Louise, may I hope you are not indifferent to me?" How tame and flat it sounded after I had got it off! And the dear girl never laughed.



"THE RECENT PARALYTIC VAULTED
OVER THE BED."

"You have known me such a short time," she said quite frankly.

"Why, it seems ages!" I protested, and encouraged by the tone I seemed able to detect in her voice, I hunted for another speech from my repertory. How did it run? Oh, yes! If the devotion of a lifetime— But just as I opened my mouth she raised her hand warningly, as her mother entered, and saved me from making an absolute fool of myself.

Now that I knew Johnstone to be harmless I felt so cordially disposed towards him that I could have embraced him on the spot, and I wondered afterwards whether the reaction from my previous excitement had made me unduly demonstrative. We were certainly a very merry party, and Johnstone came out as a most entertaining *raconteur*.

But what born actresses are women! Not the slightest sign of emotion, except perhaps in a little deepening of colour, did Louise show as a result of what had just passed; and the barely-retained pressure as I took her hand in parting was my sole assurance that there existed an understanding between us.

I was not so elated with my good fortune as to be oblivious of everything else. I was but a little distance on my way back before I was deep in consideration of the Stonewood epidemic. Approaching the village, the sign of the "Goose and Gridiron" was conspicuous, and the sight suggested an entirely new idea. As I had tested the water for lead unsuccessfully, why not examine another kind of beverage? I would extend my researches to the beer; its consumption was certainly more extensive and popular than that of the water. Dismounting, I walked into the bar, where my latest patient sat spelling out a glove-contest in a weekly paper, while a

fat, pousy old woman dozed in the parlour behind.

"Good-evening, sir. Want any refreshment?"

"Not just now, thanks, but I should like to have a bottle of your ale to take home with me."

"Which'll you have?"

"Oh, I don't know. Which do you take yourself?"

"I mostly takes the thruppenny."

"And what do Puddy and Williams fancy?" naming the blacksmith and the general shop man.

"Their fancy's the same—real old Burton," slapping the handle of the beer-engine. And then, as he filled a bottle for me, "How be Mr. Artlett now?"

"Pretty well. Do you know him?"

"Oh, yes; I knows 'im!" adding, in a stage whisper, as he jerked his thumb towards the parlour, "'E's a-sparkin' the missus! Banns are a-goin' up soon."

"But I mean Artlett—the paralysed man, you know."

"Oh, yes; that's 'im. We all knows about that there," he added, with a subtle grin.

As I rode off with the bottle of beer I tried to picture the dalliance of the bed-ridden Artlett and the fat ale-wife, who presumably was an occasional visitor to the cottage. True, their attachment could hardly rest upon what De Quincey has styled "a tenure so perishable as mere personal beauty," but Artlett enjoyed what was practically a life pension, "by County Court law," as he would have put it, enabling him to rank as a man of substance; while her beer-shop would endow the widow with attractions which the grossest flattery must deny to her person.

Just outside the village I punctured badly, and when I got down to investigate I found I had run over one of those diabolical iron boot-tips, which had entered the tyre with all its three teeth. More, they had gone right through the opposite side of the tube, for when, after a most elaborate repair, I replaced the tyre and inflated, for all my pumping I was no further forward; so off the tyre had to come, while I did another, and even larger, patching. It could not have been more than six when I punctured, but by the time I finished the sun had long set, and dusk was coming on fast. I lit my lamp and pedalled hard. There was no time to lose. I was not to know what might

be happening in my absence, and I had been away ever since noon.

"Where yer comin' to?"

Crash!

When I scrambled out of the ditch (there had been no rain of late, and it was dry, thank goodness!), the lamp was still burning on the machine as it lay far along the road, and I was just able to make out the figure of the man I had run into sitting upon a stone-heap. I was none the worse for the spill, though a bit shaken; and calling to him, "I'll soon see to you—I'm a doctor," ran to the machine. I was relieved to find both it and the bottle of beer were safe and sound; so dragging it to the side of the road, I unshipped the lamp and went back to the man. He had disappeared! At first I thought I had mistaken the spot and hunted about for another; but no, here was the patch of roadway I had swept as I skimmed into the ditch, and opposite was the heap of stones where I could swear I had seen the man holding his head and growling at me. At my feet something shone brightly as I flashed the lamp about. I picked it up; it was a brass tobacco-box, a broken clay-pipe beside it, but for which evidence of the collision I might have almost doubted its occurrence, in such ghostly fashion had the obstructionist vanished. Pocketing the box I remounted, a little stiffly, and rode on to Rougholt.

After the moving events of the day I slept soundly, but my earliest waking thought was of the beer, and scarcely waiting to swallow breakfast, I set to work examining it. Although I was inclined to distrust the chemicals, they played me no tricks; a few minutes' testing showed a marked reaction of lead in the sample, and then—I had solved the mystery! It lay in the cellars of the "Goose and Gridiron," or, rather, in the leaden pipes through which the beer was drawn from the barrels. But the next minute my enthusiasm evaporated, as I thought of Artlett. How was I to account for his share in the epidemic? He lay a good three miles from the alehouse, and the beer he drank, until the last few days at least, was supplied by the Hall. Suddenly I be-thought me of the tapster's remark, of the "sparking," and of the approaching publication of the banns. Here was a possible connection with the "Goose and Gridiron" which I must do my best to investigate.

"Why, what on earth is the matter with you?" I exclaimed when, a couple of hours

later, I visited Artlett. His left eye was completely closed by an acute swelling of the lids, a strip of postage-stamp paper concealed what appeared to be a cut across the brow, while his head was swathed in vinegar-soaked rags.

"Ah! Mr. Kirtley was like to get his heart's desire last night."

"Whatever do you mean, Artlett? And, once for all, I must ask you to drop that absurd idea about Mr. Kirtley—at any rate, when you are speaking to me."

"I was near bein' burnt alive! I was lyin' readin' the Bible last night when the candle tipped over on the bed, and a-tryin' to pick it up again I pitched clean out on my 'ead." "You must have had a job to get back again."

"Ah, you're right! It was a job, I can tell yer."

"You won't look in very good trim for the wedding," I suggested wickedly.

He leered at me suspiciously out of the corner of his eye; then, after a pause:

"Oh, my darter ain't goin' to be married yet awhile."

"No, no, Artlett," I persisted. "Don't be bashful. I'm talking of *your* wedding. How are you going to reach the church?"

"'Spose I'll get there some'ow."

I could see the old fox hardly relished the turn the conversation had taken, but I continued ruthlessly:

"I should think that the landlady will be able to get some sort of a conveyance from Stonewood for you."

"I've looked everywhere for it, father, and I can't stop any longer— Oh, I beg your pardon, sir!" Artlett's daughter, a flutter of ribbons and cheap finery, burst in upon us at this point, to his evident relief. "How do you think he is, sir? He's lost his tobacco-box, but I don't think he ought to smoke—ought he?"

I remembered the prize I had secured in my encounter the previous night with the vanishing rustic.

"Here's one you can have," said I, pulling it from my pocket.

"Why, there it is!" exclaimed the daughter. "Wherever did you find it, sir?"

"No, it ain't! I tell yer it ain't!" protested Artlett vehemently, as I offered him the box which he refused to even look at.

"Yes, it is, father. Don't be so stupid! Why see!" she took it from me. "Here's E. A. for 'Ebenezer Artlett,' what you

scratched on it yourself. Did you find it outside, sir?"

"I picked it up last night in the road. It must have been dropped by a man I ran into on my bicycle. Why, Artlett, could that have been you? How on earth—!"

I felt bewildered as a rush of new ideas and suspicions crowded upon me, and stopped short. As for Artlett, he was clearly in a state of great excitement. His face had turned pallid; even the ruby of his inflamed eyelid had blanched, while he trembled so violently that the bedstead rattled.

"Have you nothing handy to give him—something warm?" I glanced to the hob, where a little pipkin simmered.

"Here, father—come now! Take this." She had dipped into the vessel, and was offering him a basin of steaming gruel; then, turning to me, "It's all he lives on now, sir, since he won't take the things from the Hall."

Artlett was tremulously waving her away, and as the girl turned to me I suppose in his agitation he must have struck her arm; anyhow, the basin slipped from her hands, and in a moment the scalding fluid deluged the bed-clothes, thin and flimsy as they were, that covered his shanks. Whatever the girl may have expected, I was certainly not prepared for the transformation which the accident effected. One moment a bed-ridden cripple lay before us; the next, with a yell of agony, he had bounded from the bed, and before either could move a finger to detain him, rushed madly to the door at the moment a well-dressed man appeared on the threshold. Turning short off with a rustic oath, the recent paralytic vaulted over the bed again with the agility of an acrobat, and darting through the back door, disappeared in the yard behind with his daughter now in pursuit. For a second or two the new arrival and I stared at one another in amazement; then as the full absurdity of the situation dawned upon us, we both burst into a roar of laughter, which at once thawed all formality.

The stranger was the first to recover his gravity.

"I think you are Dr. Wild's *locum tenens*?" as he wiped the tears from his eyes. "I must congratulate you on the brilliant success of your treatment in unmasking an impostor."

"You know him, then?" I gasped, as soon as I had breath to speak.

"Well! My name is Kirtley."