

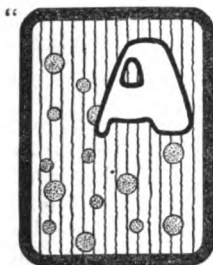


## FROM A SURGEON'S DIARY.

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

### HOW I ATTENDED A NERVOUS PATIENT.

A COMPLETE STORY.



AND what do you think is the matter, Mrs. Oakenfall?" I inquired.

"Well, really, sir, if it had been anyone else I should have said he'd got the horrors of drink on him. But then, Dr. Cuthill, he knows there isn't a more temperate man in Borleywood."

"How long have you known him?"

"It'll be eighteen months come Michaelmas since he first came to live with me, and a quieter, nicer gentleman (for a foreigner) you couldn't wish to meet."

"What do you say he is?"

"A master at the college—teaches foreign languages, and suchlike. Eyetalian, they say he is, but you'd never know it from his manner, he's that polite; nor his speech either, though he don't always understand what I says to him."

"And he seems very strange?"

"Scared, doctor! Scared out of his senses! I was doing a bit of ironing in the afternoon, and was just thinking it was getting near Mr. Valori's time for coming home, and he'd be wanting his tea presently, when all of a sudden he comes flying up the path and rushes into the house, overturning the ironing board, with never a by-your-leave, and him that's so civil always, and such a gentleman in his ways too. I see he was white as a corpse, with the sweat regular

pouring off him, and he flew upstairs to his sitting-room and slammed the door and locked it for all the world as if the old gentleman was after him. It quite upset me for the time, but as soon as I'd put things straight again I went up and knocked at the door, and asked if he wanted anything. But he wouldn't give no answer, though I could hear him moving about; so I just came down and went a step or two down the garden path to see if I could see him at the window, but he'd got the blind drawn tight. I'm sure he must have seen me, though, for as soon as I looked up the blind gave a shake, just as if he'd been peeping round it like."

"Well, what next?" I suggested mildly, as Mrs. Oakenfall paused and shook her head portentously. Cuthill had hinted, among other things, in his parting advice to me, that this was a person of some influence in the minor spheres of Borleywood; but she told her story with more than a trace of relish for its evident break in the monotony of her life, and as the morning was getting on I had other things beside her dignity to consider.

"Well, sir, I saw no more of him till the evening, when my daughter's husband came to bring me some eggs, for I use a good lot for omelettes and things for Mr. Valori, and then I heard him unlatch his door and come creeping half-way down the stairs till he could see who it was talking to me; so I went out and asked him if he wouldn't have anything to eat, but he called out,

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'No, no, no!' and ran away back and shut himself in again. When I went up this morning and told him he *must* eat something he unlocked the door, and I could see he hadn't been to bed all night, and looked dreadful peaky and ill. I gave him his breakfast, but it didn't seem as if he wanted any, and he asked me to send word to the college that he wasn't well, and shouldn't go out to-day, and I was to be sure and say he wasn't in if anyone came to see him. I asked him if I shouldn't send for the doctor, but he said 'No,' but I don't think he meant it; so as Dr. Cuthill knows his constitution, I thought I'd ask him to give a look in, for I'm sure the poor gentleman ought to have some advice, and, as you say Dr. Cuthill's away, please don't let on to Mr. Valori when you see him that I told you anything about him, will you, sir?"

"No, no; of course what you have told me is quite confidential. I shall be round presently."

I had been nearly a month at Burkfield, an engagement I had in a way secured for myself. Cuthill was—or perhaps it would be more correct to say his patients were—rather exacting as to the sort of man they expected him to leave in charge of his practice, so that he was somewhat averse to taking a stranger on the mere recommendation of an agent—even such a reliable one as my good friend Adamson; he was therefore not readily suited, and might have taken no holiday at all had he not heard of me through an old fellow-student—Walland, of Hampstead—at whose place I had that queer case of poisoning, already related, so it was now near the end of October.

St. Martin's summer—if by calling it so I may anticipate the usual date of its arrival—is a season with very special charms for me, but never had it seemed so alluring as that day when I drove in the buggy to Borleywood. The road led over a series of undulating ridges, whose sandy surface, dry even with the late heavy rains, was withal so soft and springy that our course would have been noiseless but for the clashing of the cob's hoofs, the hind against the fore, an irritating vice he had lately contracted—his "castanet exercise," as I called it. All the way ran the heather, blazing in the autumn sun, a purple ribbon either side the road, and behind it again the odorous pines set a wall of deepest green to our horizon. Presently we turned into the laurel-bordered

drive of a great park, where rabbits shot every now and then across the way, and the lazy pheasants waddled in fancied security. Through a gate, and I once more inhaled deep breaths of the pungent air as a long, desolate-looking road opened before us, with a vista dim like a cathedral aisle as the arching branches met overhead. So thickly were the pine needles strewn, the squirrels were undisturbed by our approach, and I even caught a glimpse of white-shot wing and breast as a shy woodpecker darted into the further wood.

"A likely spot for a tragedy," I remarked to the groom, the thought suggested by the deadly gloom.

"Just so, sir," agreed Trevatt politely, although I doubt if the idea penetrated his Cornish stolidity.

The wildness of the place was indeed so depressing that I felt quite a sense of relief when we struck into a by-road which presently showed on the right, and leaving the wood behind us pulled up at a trimly-kept cottage on the outskirts of the dwellings around the college.

Mrs. Oakenfall met me at the door.

"I told him you were coming," said she, "and I had a rare job to get him to stay in at first; but I think now he's rather glad, for he keeps on asking when you're coming."

In fear of more disclosures I merely nodded and followed the landlady upstairs. The room was so dark that as the door closed behind me I stood a moment endeavouring to get my bearings, but not a word came from the patient until, as I groped my way towards the window and raised the blind, a tremulous voice exclaimed, "It matters not!" I turned in the direction of the speaker, and saw a thin, dark-complexioned man crouching half-dressed upon the little iron bedstead, one trembling hand plucking nervously at his beard, while with the other he motioned me to draw the blind again.

"I'm afraid I must have a little light upon you," I protested. "Is there anything the matter with your eyes?"

"No, no!" as he shrank still further away from the window.

I could see that he was in a half-hysterical condition, and hoping to gain time, I began to talk of the college, and of the recent outbreak of measles there. After a while he ceased to answer in monosyllables, and as the nervous twitching of his hands decreased I managed to persuade him to lie down and let me overhaul him. There was very little

the matter that I could discover except a good deal of palpitation, and as I gained his confidence he admitted that he had been overworked of late coaching pupils for an examination. Nervous dyspepsia, thought I, and after a little more conversation I was about to leave him in a comparatively placid state when he startled me by bouncing off the bed, and before I could stop him had darted to the head of the stairs, where he clung to the rails listening intently, the rattle of a loose banister voicing his nervous tremor the while. His ears, more attentive than mine, had caught a knock at the cottage door, and it was not until apparently satisfied as to the identity of the milkman, whose conversation with Mrs. Oakenfall I could now hear, that he relaxed his convulsive hold upon the rails and flung himself upon the bed again.

"I was expecting someone from the college," was his explanation, delivered with an awkward smile. But I noticed that the sweat was standing in great drops upon his face, while the vessels of his neck pulsed fiercely.

"You must really take things more quietly," was my remonstrance—a lame one, no doubt, but the situation was embarrassing.

Promising to send him a tonic I groped downstairs, managing to elude Mrs. Oakenfall on the way, and drove off more than a little puzzled. Alcoholism is certainly a many-sided affection, but terrifying as are the wild ideas of delirium tremens the schoolmaster's emotion I had seen to arise from actual occurrences, and he was besides far too sensible in the intervals to give colour to any such diagnosis. I was so intent on the matter that I paid no heed to someone hailing us, and had I been alone I should probably have driven on, but the stopping of the cart woke me to a sense of my responsibilities.

Trevatt had pulled up at a farmhouse I had noticed several times in my rounds, never failing to admire the charming picture it made, regrettable as was the main cause; I learned at one time and another that it had been the homestead of a large farming estate which had fallen upon evil days, much of the land having been merged in neighbouring farms while the house remained a melancholy derelict. It was in the red-brick and timber style so common thereabouts, but ruin had clothed it with a special grace, and the ivy that crept unrestrained to the very roof softened the

ravages of weather and neglect. Deserted for many a year, it had lately been hired by an artist who was content to overlook its discomfort for the sake of its picturesque appearance, its cheapness having perhaps not a little to do with his selection. This was the man who stood, a black-bearded figure, at an open lower window.

"Please come in, doctor. I've hurt my foot."

The low-ceiled room I entered, its blackened beams fairly bristling with hooks, had evidently been the kitchen and living-place of the farm, and the huge cavern of a fireplace along one side was still furnished with broad oak settles, cosy enough no doubt when the fire blazed on the hearth and the wind whistled outside, but now there was a sense of musty dampness about the place, and the small windows with their little diamond-panes gave exceedingly little light for an artist's studio; for that it was indeed the studio was evidenced by the trade-marks of the craft all round about; but this I will say, that it was the neatest studio I have ever seen.

"Sorry to trouble you," said the artist as he hobbled across the room, leaning heavily on a stick; and then, sliding on to a rickety old sofa, he drew off his sock and showed me one of the worst sprains I had seen or am ever likely to see. As I examined it carefully, to make sure there was no fracture, he explained how he had been sauntering through a dark avenue the day before, and had slipped on some wet leaves.

"Do you mean that long drive just at the end of your road?" said I. "It would make a good background for a tragic composition, don't you think?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" he exclaimed, starting, and half rising; adding, with a groan as the sprain reminded him of his crippled condition, "very tragic, as you say."

"You are no Englishman," I thought, as he spoke, so soft was the inflection of his voice, the gestures so forcible and animated. "Excuse me," I said aloud. "What is your name?"

"Smithson," was the dogged reply, and I straightway entered it in my visiting list, but I was unconvinced: the eyes, now that I scanned him closely, were too liquid, and that lustrous black hair and olive complexion were never owned by a pure-blooded Smith or Smithson either.

Now I am not an artist, but I had smoked too many pipes in my friend Havery's studio

not to have assimilated a little of the jargon ; and as I took a roll of tape-strapping from my bag and proceeded to truss up the ankle, I turned the conversation into what I imagined was a congenial topic. But he either resented my talking shop, or else the pain of his ankle made him irritable. Anyhow, he was clearly uncomfortable, especially when I ventured a joke on the extraordinary cleanliness of his brushes, which stood in a tall jar on the mantelpiece as rustless a sheaf as if they had just left the makers. As I rose and stretched myself after bending over the ankle, I took care to make no similar remark as to a spotless palette hanging opposite me ; it seemed every whit as clean as the brushes, and bore none of that peculiar gloss which follows repeated washings of paint. But although determined to be careful what I said, I nevertheless had a good look round the room. It struck me as an odd thing that a stock of unused canvases should be all of one size. Was he, I thought, a manufacturer of pot-boilers by the square foot ? I turned to half a dozen finished pictures standing round the walls, and noted that they were all landscapes ; but, curiously enough, every-one of them was in a totally different style.

"Your own work ?" I queried.

"Yes !" came the abrupt answer. Smithson, without being exactly a genius, was certainly a very versatile painter. For instance, I never saw so many different ways of treating skies from the same hand, and the odd thing was that a sea-piece which really might have passed for an unknown work of Stanfield's stood next to a positive atrocity, which the conductor of a cheap illustrated paper would have hesitated to foist upon the public at Christmas time ; indeed, it was the very outrageousness of the latter which threw the peculiar merit of its neighbour into such prominence, and led me to the most astonishing discovery I made in this truly astonishing studio. It arose in this way. Some two or three weeks before I came down to Borleywood, after paying a visit to Adamson, the medical agent, and returning along the Strand with nothing particular to do, I ran against Havery, similarly situated. We presently stopped outside a picture dealer's, where Havery must needs illustrate his usual growl at the crassness of the public taste by the lamentable exhibition of "art" in the window. He was good enough to omit one picture

from his censure, and taking it in detail point by point, expatiated on the merits of open-air work and the "Newlyn stroke," to which he carefully drew my attention. All this came back to me as I gazed, for there, staring me in the face, was the self-same canvas, "Newlyn stroke" and all ! Havery had identified the signature—that of a quite unknown man, but destined, he said, for great things in the future if he survived so long—and I searched eagerly for it in the corner. As I might have expected, it had disappeared, but its former position was clearly shown where it had been daubed over with a splash of "art enamel," and, as I lived, the same clumsy trick had been played upon every one of the pictures I was near enough to inspect.

"You like that ?"

I started at the question, managed to blurt out, "Oh, very much—very nice indeed !" and sat down without knowing exactly what to do or say next. I think I made some irrelevant remark in a desperate attempt to regain my composure, but all I remember with any clearness is that the conversation, which was really a monologue on the artist's part, somehow drifted round to foreign travel, and for the first time he seemed to be entirely at his ease. But this mood was a very passing one ; he was talking of the South of France, Switzerland, and then Italy, when I interjected a remark about Sassoferrato. Instantly his manner changed ; he was obviously perturbed, and the fluent speech became a stutter tinged at once with that unmistakable foreign accent. One would have almost thought he had never heard the name before. And Sassoferrato, too, whose pictures are to be found in nearly every church and gallery in Italy ! The situation was really too absurd. As I rose to go I question which of us was the more embarrassed ; but as for myself, I am certain that a more awkward exit was never made by a novice in the art of leaving a patient.

"Have I been long ?" I asked Trevatt as we drove away.

"Not so very long, sir," was the diplomatic reply, deftly flicking the cob on the neck as the latter resumed his castanet exercise.

Two new patients, and each a greater mystery than the other, I reflected.

The next day, and daily for a week, I visited the schoolmaster, and either because of my treatment or in spite of it he rapidly mended regaining the calm suavity

of manner his lapse from which Mrs. Oakenfall had so lamented. It was a queer attack, truly, and at times I felt tempted to dismiss it as a case of alcoholism pure and simple, but for one thing. I discovered very soon that he had a disease of the heart, which, although not accounting for all the symptoms, went a long way to explain some of them. I certainly had not discovered it when I first saw him, and it is probable that his nervous tremors prevented me hearing accurately at the time; but at any rate the affection was plain enough now, being of that variety which has been attributed to acute nervous shock or strain, and therein it tallied with Mrs. Oakenfall's account of the onset of his illness. At the end of a week he had so far recovered as to sit out in the little quaint old-fashioned garden at the back of the cottage, well planted with hollyhocks, showing little of their short-lived summer gorgeousness. I found he was fond of cycling, and as the roads thereabouts were fairly level I consented to his taking a daily potter awheel, and put him on the "occasional" column of my visiting list.

All this time I had not been neglecting Smithson, who also prospered under my hands, but I must confess that, quite apart from the uninteresting nature of his complaint, and although there was nothing repellent about the man, I never felt quite at ease in his company. It would have been quite impossible for me to give any logical reason for this, but it might perhaps have

arisen from a vague sense of irritation at the mystery which seemed to enshroud his occupation. Although I had called at all sorts of hours, arranging the visit so as to suit the rest of my round, I never found him at work, and, what seemed more puzzling, I was never able to detect the least sign of his doing any; the pile of new canvases lay as undisturbed, the brushes and palette as cleanly, as on my first visit. He appeared to spend all his time reading yellow-paper covered French novels. He was certainly always ready for a talk, but here again he studiously avoided any hint of art matters, and the only topic which seemed to interest him was foreign politics and travel, on which I need hardly say he did most of the talking. Very excellent talking it was, too, for he was a man of education, possessed of great natural shrewdness, cosmopolitan in the best sense of the word; and had I been about to start in practice on the Riviera, for instance, the information he imparted would have been invaluable. So far as I could see he had no visitors, nor had he any servants, being looked after by an old dame from the village; and he was so much of a recluse

that I had some difficulty in persuading him, as his ankle grew stronger, to sit and read in the open air.

It was about a fortnight after my first meeting with Smithson that the incident occurred which converted the feeling of distrust I entertained for him to one of positive aversion. I had been called to a farm just



"HE CLUNG TO THE RAILS, LISTENING INTENTLY" (p. 323).

beyond Borleywood in the middle of breakfast, when, Trevatt being busy, I took my cycle, and on my way back thought I would look in upon Valori. I found him out—riding, Mrs. Oakenfall said; adding that he had picked up wonderfully, and seemed to have quite regained his spirits. As I rode homewards the long avenue looked more ghost-haunted than usual, and I was glad to turn out of it and enjoy the free-wheeling afforded by the switchback road leading straight into Burkfield. Before me stretched the heather-bordered track, and presently the wind sang in my ears with the swift rush down, up, and down again over the rolling sandy ridges. Exhilarated with the motion and by the resinous breath of the pines, so light-hearted did I feel that I could have even forgiven Smithson some of his peculiarities, and, nearing the derelict farm, was half inclined to call and wipe off a visit—perhaps the final one, as he was now practically well again. Just as I had decided to do this I topped the last ridge before the long, level Burkfield Road, and for the first time saw that I was not alone upon it. Another cyclist had just completed the switchback, and as I overhauled him rapidly I recognised Valori, pedalling gently in the same direction. The school-master appeared delighted to see me, and I remembered afterwards how cheery was his manner, and what a colour glowed in his cheeks from the exercise.

“You are not out for pleasure, doctor?”

“No, indeed. I have only had half a breakfast; just got back from one visit, and I’m thinking of making another over there.” I pointed to the farm just ahead.

He made the stock remark of a man who had never known what it is not to be able to take a meal in peace nor to go to bed devoutly praying that he may be allowed at least four hours of unbroken peace: “I should not like to be a doctor.”

“A dog’s life; only a degree less miserable than that of a sailor,” was my stock rejoinder.

“Is anyone living at the farm there?” he inquired after a pause.

“Oh, yes! An artist. By the by, he’s a great traveller, and knows the Continent well; you might like to make his acquaintance. There he is, by Jove!”

I had just caught sight of Smithson sitting at the door with a book (the inevitable French novel, I suppose) in his hand. Although we were talking naturally our ap-

proach must have been fairly silent, for even as I spoke Smithson looked up with a start, as if only just aware of us. I had risen on the pedal to dismount, and was just about to call “Good-morning” to him, when there was a loud crash behind me, and craning my neck, I saw poor Valori lying in a heap, with his cycle fallen in the ditch. I was beside him in a second, and so deathly pale did he look, that at first I was inclined to think the heart trouble had asserted itself and that he was quite dead; but he still breathed, and dragging him to one side, I called to Smithson to bring some water. I waited a minute or two, and then, as no reply came, ran up the three or four steps into the little front garden, only to find it deserted; there was the chair, certainly, with a book and pipe lying beside it; indeed, but for this evidence I might have imagined that my vision of Smithson had been an optical illusion. Almost equally annoyed as amazed, I walked to the door and tried it. It was fast locked! Now, I was determined that Smithson should not fool me in this way, so I alternately kicked at the door, and kept up such a din against it with my fists, shouting the while, that none but a person of stony deafness could have failed to hear me. The door, which by reason of its age was none of the strongest, began to show signs of yielding to my onslaught, when the Levite apparently gave place to the Samaritan, and Smithson appeared on the threshold with a jug in his hand, which he offered me, with the cool inquiry, “Do you want some water, doctor?” I could have flung it in his face, but swallowing the speech that was on the tip of my tongue I took it in silence.

Valori had not regained consciousness, and although I held nitrite of amyl to his nostrils, the slight pulse was scarcely improved, and I was turning back to insist on Smithson giving him temporary shelter when the jog-trot of an approaching cart sounded very musically to me. It was the Borleywood carrier, one Leathersole, who pulled up on seeing the state of affairs, and between us we laid poor Valori in the bottom of the cart, and storing the two machines inside, set out to return. All the time there was no further sign of Smithson, although I could feel that he was watching me from behind the closed window. On the way to Borleywood I continued my treatment, which I was relieved to find successful just before we arrived there; so,

after seeing Valori safely to bed, I made a second start for Burkfield—and breakfast.

The morning having been so muddled, I was running after time all the rest of the day, and it was not until the early evening that I was able to work round to Borleywood. Valori, I learned, had been very restless. He was constantly calling for assistance, and whenever Mrs. Oakenfall obeyed the summons she found him as nervous as in his previous attack. As I went upstairs all seemed quiet, and I thought I could hear the sound of regular breathing, as if Valori were asleep; but just as I got to the door there was an agonised scream, followed by words, which, although in a tongue to me unknown, were the accents of unmitigated horror and apprehension. Rushing in, I found him sitting up in bed with an expression of the most abject terror I have ever seen on a man's face.

"Come, come, Mr. Valori! There's nothing to be nervous at," I exclaimed soothingly; but the nearer I drew the further away he cowered and motioned me off with a tremulous hand as if still haunted by the spectres of his dream.

"Why, don't you know me? Don't you remember our ride together this morning?" I marvelled that the accident had so upset him, and almost feared that I had overlooked some injury to his head which was causing delirium.

"What happened to me? What did you do to me?" he demanded with a positive scowl.

"Happened?" I repeated, with an attempt at a hearty laugh. "Why, I think you must have overdone the cycling and fainted. Anyhow, you parted company with the machine, and were such a long time coming to that I don't know what I should have done if Leathersole the carrier hadn't come along and given us a lift."

"Why did you take me to that house?"

"I took you to no house; you fainted before we got there."

"Who is it lives there?"

"A Mr. Smithson, an artist."

"Why did he tell you to bring me?"

"He never did so. I never mentioned you to him. He has travelled in your country and knows it well, and I thought if I introduced you you might be glad to know each other."

"Is he a friend of yours?"

"He is a patient."

"How long have you known him?"

"About as long as I have known you. But——"

"What is the matter?" he interrupted. "Why do you go there?"

This was a little too much for me. I had already been catechised to an extent I would have endured from no one else, and I felt unable to humour him any longer.

"Really, Signor Valori," I protested, "I cannot discuss my patients with you or anyone else."

"Enough—enough!" And lying down again he turned his back to me.

Ungracious, even suspicious as was his manner, he was clearly not delirious, and hoping that a sound sleep would tranquillise him, I filled a medicine glass from the sedative I had brought with me and offered it to him. The next instant it was spanked from my hand to the other side of the room, with the vicious exclamation, "*Ladron!* You shall not poison me!" As I picked up the glass he crouched into bed again, and burying himself beneath the clothes, obstinately refused to stir or utter another word. I could do no more; the conviction was gradually shaping itself that he was a lunatic, and warning Mrs. Oakenfall to watch him discreetly, as any excitement might easily prove fatal, and above all not to irritate him by unnecessary attentions, I left.

Other work, already in arrears, prevented me from giving much thought to Valori for the rest of the evening, but I rose next morning with the idea of sending to London for a male attendant, a determination which was strengthened by an urgent message from Borleywood arriving before I was well dressed. By the time I had swallowed a few mouthfuls of breakfast Trevatt was ready for me; my idea was to send him on to the post office at Borleywood with a wire for the attendant while I was seeing Valori, and as we drove along I scrawled the message on my knee. It is no easy task to write in a jolting dog-cart, and I was touching up some of the more tremulous letters when Trevatt pulled up with a jerk.

"Mr. Smithson, sir," was his explanation; and sure enough it was the artist, who approached, calm and unconcerned as ever.

"Good-morning, doctor. If you are going to Borleywood, do you mind giving me a lift? My ankle isn't very strong just yet, and I want to sketch a farm out that way."

My opinion of Smithson being what it was,

I should have ignored him had I been alone, but Trevatt knew so much of other people's affairs that I rather suspected him of being a gossip, and was anxious accordingly that he should not see any lack of cordiality on my part; for the same reason I was unable

artist. It was strange how vividly he always managed to convey the impression that he had something to conceal.

Arrived at the cottage, I sent Trevatt off with the telegram, and was taking a very formal farewell of my passenger when



“ DOCTOR ! QUICK ! HE'S DYING ! ”  
SCREAMED A VOICE.”

to tell Smithson as I should like to have done what I thought of his behaviour as regards Valori. As graciously as I could, then, I invited him to get up behind, and for the sake of appearances exchanged a few commonplace remarks during the short drive. But I felt uncomfortable. Even now I was sure Smithson was lying to me, for he had neither sketch-book, colour-box, nor any of the other paraphernalia of the painting

“ Doctor ! Quick ! He's dying ! ” screamed a voice. Mrs. Oakenfall, intensely excited, was calling me. I flew up the red-tiled path, but, seizing my arm, she dragged me from the stairs as I had got my foot upon the first.

“ This way—in the garden ! ” she cried.

At the bottom of the garden, fully-dressed and clutching a hand-bag, the Italian lay prone against the fence which bordered the



little plot of grass and flowers. As I raised him I caught a faint whisper of "*Mafiosi*," and presently I felt the last flicker of his pulse as there faded in his eyes the ghastly, horrified expression, witness of his haunting terrors to the last.

"Ah, poor gentleman!" Mrs. Oakenfall sobbed. "He never stayed in bed after you left yesterday. His boxes are all turned out, and he must have been sorting them over and over all night. I didn't disturb him, as you told me not, 'cept to bring his breakfast; but he wouldn't open the door, and I took it away, and never went near him again till I see you coming, sir, and then I went up. He'd got the door open then, and was ready dressed with his hat and coat on, when I said, 'Here's the doctor,' he went to the window, and before I could stir he'd snatched up the bag, and was down the stairs two at a time. He tried to get into the field there, for when I got out he was kind of struggling to get his leg over the fence, and then he gave such a groan and fell down here."

"Is he dead?"

I turned and saw Smithson; he must have followed me through the house. For answer I closed the dead man's eyes. Smithson laughed hysterically. I faced him, all my pent-up resentment bursting out.

"This is a private house, Mr. Smithson, and let me tell you that your presence here is an intrusion. But since you have sneaked in behind me, I'll tell you that the more I see of you the less I like you, and I consider that you acted in a mean and cowardly manner when this poor fellow was in need of assistance the other day."

I clenched my fist in readiness for the blow which I quite expected would have answered me, and felt thankful that Mrs. Oakenfall, in search of help, would be no witness to an undignified scuffle in her back-garden. But Smithson had either less self-respect or more self-restraint than I anticipated.

"I admit," said he, "that I have given you cause to say all that you have—and more! As I am shortly leaving here I will take this opportunity of thanking you for your attention to myself, for which I will send you the fee at once." He raised his

hat to me, and before, in my astonishment, I had thought of something to say in reply, had disappeared.

Had I been more ready-witted with Smithson in the garden he would still have had the last word, for when I came down to breakfast a couple of mornings after I found a letter waiting me, endorsed "*With Mr. Smithson's compliments and thanks.*" It bore the London post-mark, and contained a ten-pound note (at least twice as much as Cuthill would have expected for the attendance), and the following remarkable statement:—

*"When you receive this I shall have left England for ever. My real name is immaterial to you, but I am not the least among a brotherhood more powerful than kings and emperors, numberless as the motes in a sun-beam, widely diffused as its light. Some two years ago a member violated its laws, and was adjudged to die by his own hand. The coward fled, and another man was selected to execute his sentence. That traitor you knew as Valori, the avenger was myself. We were both chemists by profession, and he had betrayed for gain the secret of a new and deadly explosive invented by me. I tracked him to his hiding-place, met him in the lonely avenue, and would have killed him but for the accident in pursuing him which introduced me to you. My mission has not been unsuccessful. Think more kindly of me. Adieu."*

From the last word of the dying Valori I imagine that the brotherhood so vauntingly alluded to by "Smithson" was the *Mafia*, the infamous society which to this day practically though secretly governs Sicily and much of Italy as well.

It only remains for me to add that the most remarkable thing about this remarkable communication was its fate in my possession. In packing up to leave Burkfield about a week later, I found the envelope intact, but although the letter was safe inside, the paper was an absolute blank! It must have been written upon with vanishing ink, a composition known to every analytical chemist.

