Doctor Therne

By

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Some months since the leaders of the Government dismayed theirsupporters and astonished the world by a sudden surrender to the clamourof the anti-vaccinationists. In the space of a single evening, witha marvellous versatility, they threw to the agitators the ascertainedresults of generations of the medical faculty, the report of a RoyalCommission, what are understood to be their own convictions, and thePresident of the Local Government Board. After one ineffectual fight theHouse of Lords answered to the whip, and, under the guise of a "gracefulconcession," the health of the country was given without appeal into thehand of the "Conscientious Objector."

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

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

The importance of the issue to those helpless children from whomthe State has thus withdrawn its shield, is this writer's excuse forinviting the public to interest itself in a medical tale.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

DOCTOR THERNE

CHAPTER I - THE DILIGENCE

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

These occurrences and others are more than enough to turn the publicmind from the recollection of the appalling smallpox epidemic thatpassed over England last autumn two years, of which the first fury brokeupon the city of Dunchester, my native place, that for many years I hadthe honour to represent in Parliament. The population of Dunchester, itis true, is smaller by over five thousand souls, and many of those whosurvive are not so good-looking as they were, but the gap is easilyfilled and pock-marks are not hereditary. Also, such a horror willnever happen again, for now the law of compulsory vaccination is strongenough! Only the dead have cause of complaint, those who were cut offfrom the world and despatched hot-foot whither we see not. Myself I amcertain of nothing; I know too much about the brain and body to havemuch faith in the soul, and I pray to God that I may be right. Ah! thereit comes in. If a God, why not the rest, and who shall say there is noGod? Somehow it seems to me that more than once in my life I have seenHis Finger.

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

Yes--five thousand of them or more in Dunchester alone, and, makingevery allowance, I suppose that in this one city there were very many ofthese--young people mostly--who owed their deaths to me, since it wasmy persuasion, my eloquent arguments, working upon the minds of theirprejudiced and credulous elders, that surely, if indirectly, broughttheir doom upon them. "A doctor is not infallible, he may makemistakes." Quite so, and if a mistake of his should kill a fewthousands, why, that is the act of God (or of Fate) working through hisblindness. But if it does not happen to have been a mistake, if, forinstance, all those dead, should they still live in any place or shape,could say to me, "James

Therne, you are the murderer of our bodies,since, for your own ends, you taught us that which you knew not to bethe truth."

How then? I ask. So--let them say it if they will. Let all that greatcloud of witnesses compass me about, lads and maidens, children andinfants, whose bones cumber the churchyards yonder in Dunchester. I defythem, for it is done and cannot be undone. Yet, in their company are twowhose eyes I dread to meet: Jane, my daughter, whose life was sacrificedthrough me, and Ernest Merchison, her lover, who went to seek her in thetomb.

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

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

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

Selling his Dunchester practice for what it would fetch to hisassistant, Dr. Bell, my father came to Madeira--whither, I scarcely knowwhy, I have also drifted now that all is over for me--for here he hopedto be able to earn a living by doctoring the English visitors. This,however, he could not do, since the climate proved no

match for hisdisease, though he lingered for nearly two years, during which time hespent all the money that he had. When he died there was scarcely enoughleft to pay for his funeral in the little churchyard yonder that I cansee from the windows of this quinta. Where he lies exactly I do notknow as no record was kept, and the wooden cross, the only monument thatmy mother could afford to set over him, has long ago rotted away.

Some charitable English people helped my mother to return to England,where we went to live with her mother, who existed on a pension of about120 pounds a year, in a fishing-village near Brighton. Here I grew up,getting my education--a very good one by the way--at a cheap day school.My mother's wish was that I should become a sailor like her own father,who had been a captain in the Navy, but the necessary money was notforthcoming to put me into the Royal Navy, and my liking for the sea wasnot strong enough to take me into the merchant service.

From the beginning I wished to be a doctor like my father andgrandfather before me, for I knew that I was clever, and I knew alsothat successful doctors make a great deal of money. Ground down as Ihad been by poverty from babyhood, already at nineteen years of ageI desired money above everything on earth. I saw then, and subsequentexperience has only confirmed my views, that the world as it has becomeunder the pressure of high civilisation is a world for the rich. Leavingmaterial comforts and advantages out of the question, what ambitioncan a man satisfy without money? Take the successful politicians forinstance, and it will be found that almost every one of them is rich.This country is too full; there is scant room for the individual. Onlyintellectual Titans can force their heads above the crowd, and, as arule, they have not even then the money to take them higher. If I hadmy life over again--and it is my advice to all young men of ability andambition--I would leave the old country and settle in America or in oneof the great colonies. There, where the conditions are more elastic andthe competition is not so cruel, a hard-working man of talent does notneed to be endowed with fortune to enable him to rise to the top of thetree.

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

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

masters.

At four and twenty, having finished my curriculum with high honours--Iwas gold medallist of my year in both medicine and surgery--I becamehouse-surgeon to one of the London hospitals. After my term of officewas over I remained at the hospital for another year, for I wishedto make a practical study of my profession in all its branches beforestarting a private practice. At the end of this time my mother diedwhile still comparatively young. She had never really recovered from theloss of my father, and, though it was long about it, sorrow sapped herstrength at last. Her loss was a shock to me, although in fact we hadfew tastes in common. To divert my mind, and also because I was somewhatrun down and really needed a change, I asked a friend of mine who was adirector of a great steamship line running to the West Indies and Mexicoto give me a trip out, offering my medicine services in return for thepassage. This he agreed to do with pleasure; moreover, matters were soarranged that I could stop in Mexico for three months and rejoin thevessel on her next homeward trip.

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

At length I arranged to start for the City of Mexico, to which inthose days the journey from Vera Cruz was performed by diligence as therailway as not yet finished. At that time Mexico was a wild country.Wars and revolutions innumerable, together with a certain naturalleaning that way, had reduced a considerable proportion of itsinhabitants to the road, where they earned a precarious living--not bymending it, but by robbing and occasionally cutting the throats of anytravellers whom they could catch.

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

It was somewhere in the temperate zone that we passed a town consistingof fifteen adobe or mud houses and seventeen churches. The excessivereligious equipment of this city is accounted for by an almostinaccessible mountain stronghold in the neighbourhood. This strongholdfor generations had been occupied by brigands, and it was thetime-honoured custom of each chieftain of the band, when he retired ona hard-earned competence, to expiate any regrettable incidents in hiscareer by building a church in the town dedicated to his patron saintand to the memory of those whose souls he had helped to Paradise. Thispious and picturesque, if somewhat mediaeval, custom has now come to anend, as I understand that the Mexican Government caused the strongholdto be stormed a good many years ago, and put its occupants, to thenumber of several hundreds, to the sword.

We were eight in the coach, which was drawn by as many mules--fourmerchants, two priests, myself and the lady who afterwards became mywife. She was a blue-eyed and fair-haired American from New York. Hername, I soon discovered, was Emma Becker, and her father, who was dead,had been a lawyer. We made friends at once, and before we had joltedten miles on our journey I learned her story. It seemed that she was anorphan with a very small fortune, and only one near relative, an auntwho had married a Mexican named Gomez, the owner of a fine range orhacienda situated on the border of the highlands, about eighty milesfrom the City of Mexico. On the death of her father, being like mostAmerican girls adventurous and independent, Miss Becker had acceptedan invitation from her aunt Gomez and her husband to come and live withthem a while. Now, quite alone and unescorted, she was on her way toMexico City, where she expected to be met by some friends of her uncle.

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

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

Following her hand I saw a sight which no one who has witnessed it canever forget: the sun rising on the mighty peak of Orizaba, the StarMountain, as the old Aztecs named it. Eighteen thousand feet above ourheads towered the great volcano, its foot clothed with forests, its conedusted with snow. The green flanks

of the peak and the country beneaththem were still wrapped in shadow, but on its white and lofty crestalready the lights of dawn were burning. Never have I seen anything morebeautiful than this soaring mountain top flaming like some giant torchover a world of darkness; indeed, the unearthly grandeur of the sightamazed and half paralysed my mind.

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

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

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

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

Presently Emma seemed to fall asleep, at least she shut her eyes. But Icould not sleep, and sat there listening to the snores of the fat priestand the strange interminable oaths of the drivers as they thrashed themules. Opposite to me, tied to the roof of the coach immediately aboveEmma's head, was a cheap looking-glass, provided, I suppose, for theconvenience of passengers when making the toilette of travel. In it Icould see myself reflected, so, having nothing better to do, in view ofcontingencies which of a sudden had become possible, I amused myself bytaking count of my personal appearance. On the whole in those days itwas not unsatisfactory. In build, I was tall and slight, with thin,nervous hands. My

colouring and hair were dark, and I had soft andrather large brown eyes. The best part of my face was my forehead, whichwas ample, and the worst my mouth, which was somewhat weak. I do notthink, however, that any one would have guessed by looking at me as Ithen appeared at the age of seven and twenty, that I was an exceedinglyhard-working man with extraordinary powers of observation and a reallyretentive memory.

At any rate, I am sure that it was not these qualities which recommendedme to Emma Becker, nor, whatever we may have felt under the influencesof Orizaba, was it any spiritual affinity. Doctors, I fear, are notgreat believers in spiritual affinities; they know that such emotionscan be accounted for in other ways. Probably Emma was attracted tome because I was dark, and I to her because she was fair. Orizaba andopportunity merely brought out and accentuated these quite naturalpreferences.

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

I was reflecting, I remember, that this would be an ill path to drivewith a drunken coachman, when suddenly I saw the off-front mule stumbleunaccountably, and, as it fell, heard a shot fired close at hand. Nextinstant also I saw the driver and his companion spring from thebox, and, with a yell of terror, plunge over the edge of the cliff,apparently into the depths below. Then from the narrow compass of thatcoach arose a perfect pandemonium of sounds, with an under cry of asingle word, "Brigands! Brigands!"

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

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

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

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

I nodded my head.

"Will you lend it me? You understand?"

"Yes," I answered, "I understand, but I hope that things are not so badas that."

"They are," she answered with a quiver in her voice. "I have heard aboutthese Mexican brigands. With the exception of that priest and myselfthey will put all of you into the coach and push it over the precipice."

At her words my heart stood still and a palpable mist gathered beforemy eyes. When it cleared away my brain seemed to awake to an abnormalactivity, as though the knowledge that unless it was used to good effectnow it would never be used again were spurring it to action. Rapidly Ireviewed the situation and considered every possible method of escape.At first I could think of none; then suddenly I remembered that thedriver and his companion, who no doubt knew every inch of the road, hadleaped from the coach, apparently over the edge of the precipice. This Ifelt sure they would not have done had they been going to certain death,since they would have preferred to take their chance of mercy at thehands of the brigands. Moreover, these gentry themselves had driven themules into the abyss whither those wise animals would never have goneunless there was some foothold for them.

I looked behind me but could discover nothing, for, as is common inMexico at the

hour of dawn, the gulf was absolutely filled with densevapours. Then I made up my mind that I would risk it and began toshuffle slowly backwards. Already I was near the edge when I rememberedEmma Becker and paused to reflect. If I took her with me it wouldconsiderably lessen my chances of escape, and at any rate her life wasnot threatened. But I had not given her the pistol, and at that momenteven in my panic there rose before me a vision of her face as I had seenit in the lamplight when she looked up at the glory shining on the crestof Orizaba.

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

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

"Of course," she answered; "I had as soon die of a broken neck as in anyother way."

"We must watch our chance then, or they will see us run and shoot. Waittill I give you the signal."

She nodded her head and we waited.

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

them overtook the man and cut him down with his machete.

"Don't look, but come," I whispered to my companion.

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

"We can't be worse off, so God help us," said Emma, and without waitingfor me to lead her she swung herself over the edge.

To my intense relief I heard her alight within a few feet, and followedimmediately. Now I was at her side, and now we were scrambling andslipping down the precipitous and rocky slope as swiftly as the densewet fog would let us. I believe that our escape was quite unnoticed. Theguard was watching the murder of the merchant, or, if he saw us, he didnot venture to leave the carriage door, and the priest who had acceptedsome offer which was made to him, probably that his life would be sparedif he consented to give absolution to the murderers, was kneeling on theground, his face hidden in his hands.

As we went the mist grew thinner, and we could see that we weretravelling down a steep spur of the precipice, which to our left wasquite sheer, and that at the foot of it was a wide plain thickly but notdensely covered with trees. In ten minutes we were at the bottom, andas we could neither see nor hear any sign of pursuers we paused for aninstant to rest.

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

"We chose our place well," I said pointing upwards.

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

As she spoke a muffled and terrifying sound of agony reached us fromabove, and then, in the layers of vapour that still stretched betweenus and the sky, we perceived something huge rushing swiftly down. Itappeared; it drew near; it struck, and fell to pieces like a shatteredglass. We ran to look, and there before us were the fragments ofthe diligence, and among them the mangled corpses of five of ourfellow-travellers.

This was the fate that we had escaped.

"Oh! for God's sake come away," moaned Emma, and sick with horror weturned and ran, or rather reeled, into the shelter of the trees upon theplain.

CHAPTER II - THE HACIENDA

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

"Can you ride?" I asked.

She nodded her head. Then we set to work. Having caught the muleswithout difficulty, I took off their superfluous harness and put her onthe back of one of them, mounting the other myself. There was no timeto lose, and we both of us knew it. Just as we were starting I heard avoice behind me calling "senor." Drawing the pistol from my pocket, Iswung round to find myself confronted by a Mexican.

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

"To Mexico," I answered.

"No get Mexico, senor; bad men watch road and kill you with macheteso," and he made a sweep with his knife, adding "they not want you livetell soldiers."

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

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

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

All that day we travelled over mountains as fast as the mules couldcarry us, Antonio trotting by our side. At sundown, having seen nothingmore of the brigands, who, I suppose, took it for granted that we weredead or were too idle to follow us far, we reached an Indian hut, wherewe contrived to buy some wretched food consisting of black frijolebeans and tortilla cakes. That night we slept in a kind of hovel madeof open poles with a roof of faggots through which the water dropped onus, for it rained persistently for several hours. To be more

accurate,Emma slept, for my nerves were too shattered by the recollection of ouradventure with the brigands to allow me to close my eyes.

I could not rid my mind of the vision of that coach, broken like aneggshell, and of those shattered shapes within it that this very morninghad been men full of life and plans, but who to-night were--what? Norwas it easy to forget that but for the merest chance I might have beenone of their company wherever it was gathered now. To a man with aconstitutional objection to every form of violence, and, at any ratein those days, no desire to search out the secrets of Death before histime, the thought was horrible.

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

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

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

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

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

We were now passing down the central street of the town, which I noticedseemed very deserted. As we drew near to the plaza or market squarewe met a cart drawn by two mules and led by a man who had a serapewrapped about his nose and mouth as though it were still the hour beforethe dawn. Over the contents of this cart a black cloth was thrown,beneath which were outlined shapes that

suggested--but, no, it could notbe. Only why did Antonio cross himself and mutter Muerte! or some suchword?

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

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

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

For this I am not to blame. The fear is a part of my nature, instilledinto it doubtless by the shock which my mother received before my birthwhen she learned that her husband had been attacked by this horriblesickness. So great and vivid was my dread that I refused a verygood appointment at a smallpox hospital, and, although I had severalopportunities of attending these cases, I declined to undertake them,and on this account suffered somewhat in reputation among those who knewthe facts. Indeed, my natural abhorrence went even further, as, to thisday, it is only with something of an effort that I can bring myself toinspect the vesicles caused by vaccination. Whether this is becauseof their similarity to those of smallpox, or owing to the naturalassociation which exists between them, I cannot tell. That it is realenough, however, may be judged by the fact that, terrified as I was atsmallpox, and convinced as I have always been of the prophylactic powerof vaccination, I could never force myself--until an occasion to be toldof--to submit to it. In infancy, no doubt, I was vaccinated, for theoperation has left a small and very faint cicatrix on my arm, butinfantile vaccination, if unrepeated, is but a feeble protection inlater life.

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

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

The old woman looked up and saw me. "Si, Senor Inglese," she said with aghastly smile, "viruela, viruela!" and she went on gabbling somethingwhich I could not understand.

"She say," broke in Antonio, "nearly quarter people dead and plentysick."

"For Heaven's sake, let us get out of this," I said to Emma, who, seatedon the other mule, was staring horror-struck at the sight.

"Oh!" she said, "you are a doctor; can't you help the poor things?"

"What! and leave you to shift for yourself?"

"Never mind me, Dr. Therne. I can go on to the hacienda, or if youlike I will stay too; I am not afraid, I was revaccinated last year."

"Don't be foolish," I answered roughly. "I could not dream of exposingyou to such risks, also it is impossible for me to do any good herealone and without medicines. Come on at once," and seizing her mule bythe bridle I led it along the road that ran through the town towards thehacienda on the height above.

Ten minutes later we were riding in the great courtyard. The placeseemed strangely lifeless and silent; indeed, the plaintive mewing of acat was the only sound to be heard. Presently, however, a dog appearedout of an open doorway. It was a large animal of the mastiff breed, suchas might have been expected to bark and become aggressive to strangers.But this it did not do; indeed, it ran forward and greeted usaffectionately. We dismounted and knocked at the double door, but noone answered. Finally we entered, and the truth became clear to us--thehacienda was deserted. A little burial ground attached to the chapeltold us why, for in it were several freshly-made graves, evidently ofpeons or other servants, and in an enclosure, where lay interredsome departed members of the Gomez family, another unsodded mound. Wediscovered afterwards that it was that of the Senor Gomez, Emma's uncleby marriage.

"The footsteps of smallpox," I said, pointing to the graves; "we must goon."

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

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

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

At first Emma was dazed and crushed by fatigue and emotion, but sherecovered her spirits after a night's sleep and on learning fromAntonio, who was told it by some peon, that it was not her aunt thatthe smallpox had killed, but her uncle by marriage, whom she had neverseen. Having no fear of the disease, indeed, she became quite resignedand calm, for the strangeness and novelty of the position absorbedand interested her. Also, to my alarm, it excited her philanthropicinstincts, her great idea being to turn the hacienda into aconvalescent smallpox hospital, of which she was to be the nurse andI the doctor. Indeed she refused to abandon this mad scheme untilI pointed out that in the event of any of our patients dying, mostprobably we should both be murdered for wizards with the evil eye. As amatter of fact, without medicine or assistance we could have done littleor nothing.

Oh, what a pestilence was that of which for three weeks or so we werethe daily witnesses, for from the flat roof of the hacienda we couldsee straight on to the plaza of the little town. And when at night wecould not see, still we could hear the wails of the dying and bereaved,the eternal clang of the church bells, rung to scare away the demon ofdisease, and the midnight masses chanted by the priests, that grew faintand fainter as their brotherhood dwindled, until at last they ceased.And so it went on in the tainted, stricken place until the living werenot enough to bury the dead, or to do more than carry food and water tothe sick.

It would seem that about twelve years before a philanthropic Americanenthusiast, armed with a letter of recommendation from whoever at thatdate was President of Mexico, and escorted by a small guard, descendedupon San Jose to vaccinate it. For a few days all went well, for theenthusiast was a good doctor, who understood how to treat ophthalmia andto operate for squint, both of which complaints were prevalent in SanJose. Then his first vaccination patients developed vesicles, and thetrouble began. The end of the matter was that the local priests, a veryignorant class of men, interfered, declaring that smallpox was a trialsent from Heaven which it was impious to combat, and that in any casevaccination was the worse disease of the two.

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

After the first fortnight this existence in an atmosphere of diseasebecame absolutely terrible to me. Not an hour of the day passed that Idid not imagine some symptom of smallpox, and every morning when we metat breakfast I glanced at Emma with anxiety. The shadow of the thing laydeep upon my nerves, and I knew well that if I stopped there much longerI should fall a victim to it in the body. In this emergency, by meansof Antonio, I opened negotiations with the officer of the rurales,and finally, after much secret bargaining, it was arranged that inconsideration of a sum of two hundred dollars--for by good luck I hadescaped from the brigands with my money--our flight through the cordonof guards should not be observed in the darkness.

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

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

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

Poor Antonio! I wonder what became of him; he was a good fellow, and Ihope that

he recovered. It grieved me much to leave him, but after allI had my own safety to think of, and still more that of Emma, who hadgrown very dear to me. Perhaps one day I shall find him "beyond themountains," but, if so, that is a meeting from which I expect no joy.

The rest of our journey was strange enough, but it has nothing to dowith this history. Indeed, I have only touched upon these long pastadventures in a far land because they illustrate the curious fatality bythe workings of which every important event of my life has taken placeunder the dreadful shadow of smallpox. I was born under that shadow, Iwedded under it, I--but the rest shall be told in its proper order.

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

CHAPTER III - SIR JOHN BELL

Now it is that I came to the great and terrible event of my life, whichin its result turned me into a false witness and a fraud, and boundupon my spirit a weight of blood-guiltiness greater than a man isoften called upon to bear. As I have not scrupled to show I haveconstitutional weaknesses--more, I am a sinner, I know it; I have sinnedagainst the code of my profession, and have preached a doctrine I knewto be false, using all my skill and knowledge to confuse and pervert theminds of the ignorant. And yet I am not altogether responsible for thesesins, which in truth in the first place were forced upon me by shame andwant and afterwards by the necessities of my ambition. Indeed, in thatdark and desperate road of deceit there is no room to turn; the steponce taken can never be retraced.

But if I have sinned, how much greater is the crime of the man who sworeaway my honour and forced me through those gateways? Surely on his headand not on mine should rest the burden of my deeds; yet he prospered allhis life, and I have been told that his death was happy and painless.This man's career furnishes one of the few arguments that to mysceptical mind suggest the existence of a place of future reward andpunishment, for how is it possible that so great a villain should reapno fruit from his rich sowing of villainy? If it is possible, thenverily this world is the real hell wherein the wicked are lords and thegood their helpless and hopeless slaves.

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

London being out of the question, I made up my mind to try my fortunein the ancient city of Dunchester, where the name of Therne was stillremembered, as my grandfather and father had practised there beforeme. I journeyed to the place and made inquiries, to find that, althoughthere were plenty of medical men of a sort, there was only one whosecompetition I had cause to fear. Of the others, some had no presence,some no skill, and some no character; indeed, one of them was known todrink.

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

In short, if ever a faux bonhomme existed, Sir John Bell was the man.Needless to say he was as popular as he was prosperous. Such of thepractice of Dunchester as was worth having soon fell into his hands,and few indeed were the guineas that slipped out of his fingers into thepocket of a poorer brother. Also, he had a large consulting connectionin the county. But if his earnings were great so were his spendings, forit was part of his system to accept civic and magisterial offices and toentertain largely in his official capacities. This meant that the moneywent out as fast as it came in, and that, however much was earned, morewas always needed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Beginning to despair, I applied for one or two minor appointments inanswer to advertisements inserted by the Board of Guardians and otherpublic bodies. In each case was I not only unsuccessful, but men equallyunknown, though with a greatly inferior college and hospital record,were chosen over my head. At length, suspecting that I was not beingfairly dealt by, I made inquiries to discover that at the bottom of allthis ill success was none other than Sir John Bell. It appeared that inseveral instances, by the shrugs of his thick shoulders and shakes ofhis ponderous head, he had prevented my being employed. Indeed, in thecase of the

public bodies, with all of which he had authority eitheras an official or as an honorary adviser, he had directly vetoed myappointment by the oracular announcement that, after ample inquiry amongmedical friends in London, he had satisfied himself that I was not asuitable person for the post.

When I had heard this and convinced myself that it was substantiallytrue--for I was always too cautious to accept the loose and unsiftedgossip of a provincial town--I think that for the first time in my lifeI experienced the passion of hate towards a human being. Why shouldthis man who was so rich and powerful thus devote his energies to thedestruction of a brother practitioner who was struggling and poor?At the time I set it down to pure malice, into which without doubt itblossomed at last, not understanding that in the first place on SirJohn's part it was in truth terror born of his own conscious mediocrity.Like most inferior men, he was quick to recognise his master, and,either in the course of our conversations or through inquiries thathe made concerning me, he had come to the conclusion that so far asprofessional ability was concerned I was his master. Therefore, beinga creature of petty and dishonest mind, he determined to crush me beforeI could assert myself.

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

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

About a year after I arrived in Dunchester I was elected a member of theCity Club. It is a pleasant place, where ladies are admitted to lunch,and I used it a good deal in the hope of making acquaintances who mightbe useful to me. Among the habitues of this club was a certain MajorSelby, who, having retired from the army and being without occupation,was generally to be found in the smoking or billiard room with a largecigar between his teeth and a whisky and soda at his

side. In face, theMajor was florid and what people call healthy-looking, an appearancethat to a doctor's eye very often conveys no assurance of physicalwell-being. Being a genial-mannered man, he would fall into conversationwith whoever might be near to him, and thus I came to be slightlyacquainted with him. In the course of our chats he frequently mentionedhis ailments, which, as might be expected in the case of such aluxurious liver, were gouty in their origin.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Four days later I was in the club at the same hour, and again MajorSelby entered. This time he walked with considerable difficulty, andI noticed an expression of pain and malaise upon his rubicundcountenance. He ordered a whisky and soda from the servant, and then satdown near me.

"Rheumatism no better, Major?" I asked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So Major Selby departed in his cab and I went home, and, having nothingbetter to do, turned up my notes on various cases of venous thrombosis,or blood-clot in the veins, which I had treated at one time or another.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Asking those present in the room, a brother and a grown-up son of thepatient, to stand back, I made a rapid examination; then I wrote aprescription and sent it round to the chemist--it contained ammonia, Iremember--and ordered hot fomentations to be placed upon the leg. Whilethese matters were being attended to I went with the relations intoanother room.

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

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

"Is it serious?" asked the poor wife.

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

"Oh, this is ridiculous," broke in Mr. Selby. "My brother has been underthe care of Sir John Bell, the ablest doctor in Dunchester, who told himseveral times that he was suffering from nothing but rheumatism, andnow this gentleman starts a totally different theory, which, if itwere true, would prove Sir John to be a most careless and incompetentperson."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When everything was over there was something of a scene. Sir Johnasserted that my conduct had been impertinent and unprofessional. Ireplied that I had only done my duty and appealed to Dr. Jeffries, whoremarked drily that we had to deal not with opinions and theories butwith facts and that the facts seemed to bear me out. On learning thetruth, the relatives, who until now had been against me, turned uponSir John and reproached him in strong terms, after which they went awayleaving us face to face. There was an awkward silence, which I brokeby saying that I was sorry to have been the unwilling cause of thisunpleasantness.

"You may well be sorry, sir," Sir John answered in a cold voice that wasyet alive with anger, "seeing that by your action you have exposed me toinsult, I who have practised in this city for over thirty years, and whowas your father's partner before you were in your cradle. Well, itis natural to youth to be impertinent. To-day the laugh is yours, Dr.Therne, to-morrow it may be mine; so good-afternoon, and let us say nomore about it," and brushing by me rudely he passed from the house.

I followed him into the street watching his thick square form, of whicheven the back seemed to express sullen anger and determination. At adistance of a few yards stood the brother of the dead man, Mr. Selby,talking to Dr. Jeffries, one of whom made some remark that caught SirJohn's ear. He stopped as though to answer, then, changing his mind,turned his head and looked back at me. My

sight is good and I could seehis face clearly; on it was a look of malignity that was not pleasant tobehold.

"I have made a bad enemy," I thought to myself; "well, I am in theright; one must take risks in life, and it is better to be hated thandespised."

Major Selby was a well-known and popular man, whose sudden death hadexcited much sympathy and local interest, which were intensified whenthe circumstances connected with it became public property.

On the following day the leading city paper published a report of theresults of the post-mortem, which doubtless had been furnished by therelatives, and with it an editorial note.

In this paragraph I was spoken of in very complimentary terms; mymedical distinctions were alluded to, and the confident belief wasexpressed that Dunchester would not be slow to avail itself of my skilland talent. Sir John Bell was not so lightly handled. His gross error oftreatment in the case of the deceased was, it is true, slurred over, butsome sarcastic and disparaging remarks were aimed at him under cover ofcomparison between the old and the new school of medical practitioners.

CHAPTER IV - STEPHEN STRONG GOES BAIL

Great are the uses of advertisement! When I went into my consulting-roomafter breakfast that day I found three patients waiting to see me, oneof them a member of a leading family in the city.

Here was the beginning of my success. Whatever time may remain tome, to-day in a sense my life is finished. I am a broken-hearted anddiscomfited man, with little more to fear and nothing to hope. ThereforeI may be believed when I say that in these pages I set down the truthand nothing but the truth, not attempting to palliate my conduct whereit has been wrong, nor to praise myself even when praise may have beendue. Perhaps, then, it will not be counted conceit when I write thatin my best days I was really a master of my trade. To my faculty fordiagnosis I have, I think, alluded; it amounted to a gift--a touchor two of my fingers would often tell me what other doctors couldnot discover by prolonged examination. To this I added a considerablemastery of the details of my profession, and a sympathetic insight intocharacter, which enabled me to apply my knowledge to the best advantage.

When a patient came to me and told me that his symptoms were thisor that or the other, I began by studying the man and forming my ownconclusions as to his temperament, character, and probable past. Itwas this method of mine of studying the individual as a whole and hisailment as something springing from and natural to his physical andspiritual entity that, so far as general principles can be applied toparticular instances, often gave me a grip of the evil, and enabledme, by dealing with the generating cause, to strike at its immediatemanifestation. My axiom was that in the human subject mind is king; themind commands, the body obeys. From this follows the corollary that thereally great doctor, however trivial the complaint, should always beginby trying to understand the mind of his patient, to follow the course ofits workings, and estimate their results upon his physical nature.

Necessarily there are many cases to which this rule does not seem toapply, those of contagious sickness, for instance, or those of surgery,resulting from accident. And yet even there it does apply, for thecondition of the mind may predispose to infection, and to recoveryor collapse in the instance of the sufferer from injuries. But thesequestions of predisposition and consequence are too great to argue here,though even the most rule-of-thumb village practitioner, with a blackdraught in one hand and a pot of ointment in the other, will agree thatthey admit of a wide application.

At least it is to these primary principles over and above my technicalskill that I attribute my success while I was successful. That at anyrate was undoubted. Day by day my practice grew, to such an extentindeed, that on making up my books at the end of the second year, Ifound that during the preceding twelve months I had taken over 900pounds in fees and was owed about 300 pounds more. Most of this balance,however, I wrote off as a bad debt, since I made it a custom neverto refuse a patient merely because he might not be able to pay me. Icharged large fees, for a doctor gains nothing by being cheap, but if Ithought it inexpedient I did not attempt to collect them.

After this matter of the inquest on Major Selby the relations betweenSir John Bell and myself were very strained--in fact, for a whilehe refused to meet me in consultation. When this happened, withoutattempting to criticise his action, I always insisted upon retiring fromthe case, saying that it was not for me, a young man, to stand in thepath of one of so great experience and reputation. As might be expectedthis moderation resulted in my triumph, for the time came when SirJohn thought it wise to waive his objections and to recognise meprofessionally. Then I knew that I had won the day, for in that equalfield I was his master. Never once that I can remember did he ventureto reverse or even to cavil at my treatment, at any rate in my presence,though doubtless he criticised it freely elsewhere.

And so I flourished, and as I waxed he waned, until, calculating mychances with my wife, I was able to prophesy that if no accident orill-chance occurred to stop me, within another three years I should bethe leading practitioner in Dunchester, while Sir John Bell would occupythe second place.

But I had reckoned without his malice, for, although I knew this to beinveterate, I had underrated its probable effects, and in due course theill-chance happened. It came about in this wise.

When we had been married something over two years my wife found herselfexpecting to become a mother. As the event drew near she expressed greatanxiety that I should attend upon her. To this, however, I objectedstrenuously--first, because I cannot bear to see any one to whom I amattached suffer pain, and, secondly, because I knew that my affectionand personal anxiety would certainly unnerve me. Except in cases of theutmost necessity no man, in my opinion, should doctor himself or hisfamily. Whilst I was wondering how to arrange matters I chanced to meetSir John Bell in consultation. After our business was over, developingan unusual geniality of manner, he proposed to walk a little way withme.

"I understand, my dear Therne," he said, "that there is an interestingevent

expected in your family."

I replied that this was so.

"Well," he went on, "though we may differ on some points, I am surethere is one upon which we shall agree--that no man should doctor hisown flesh and blood. Now, look here, I want you to let me attend uponyour good wife. However much you go-ahead young fellows may turn upyour noses at us old fossils, I think you will admit that by this time Iought to be able to show a baby into the world, especially as I had thehonour of performing that office for yourself, my young friend."

For a moment I hesitated. What Sir John said was quite true; he was asound and skilful obstetrician of the old school. Moreover, he evidentlyintended to hold out the olive branch by this kind offer, which I feltthat I ought to accept. Already, having conquered in the fray, I forgavehim the injuries that he had worked me. It is not in my nature to bearunnecessary malice--indeed, I hate making or having an enemy. And yetI hesitated, not from any premonition or presentiment of the dreadfulevents that were to follow, but simply because of my wife's objectionto being attended by any one but myself. I thought of advancing thisin excuse of a refusal, but checked myself, because I was sure that hewould interpret it as a rebuff, and in consequence hate me more bitterlythan ever. So in the end I accepted his offer gratefully, and we parted.

When I told Emma she was a little upset, but being a sensible woman shesoon saw the force of my arguments and fell in with the situation.In truth, unselfish creature that she was, she thought more of theadvantage that would accrue to me by this formal burying of the hatchetthan of her own prejudices or convenience.

The time came and with it Sir John Bell, large, sharp-eyed, and jocose.In due course and under favourable conditions a daughter was born to me,a very beautiful child, fair like her mother, but with my dark eyes.

I think it was on the fourth day from the birth of the child that I wentafter luncheon to see my wife, who so far had done exceedingly well.I found her depressed, and she complained of headache. Just then theservant arrived saying that I was wanted in the consulting-room, so Ikissed Emma and, after arranging her bed-clothing and turning her overso that she might lie more comfortably, I hurried downstairs, tellingher that she had better go to sleep.

While I was engaged with my visitor Sir John Bell came to see my wife.Just as the patient had gone and Sir John was descending the stairs amessenger hurried in

with a note summoning me instantly to attend uponLady Colford, the wife of a rich banker and baronet who, I knew, wasexpecting her first confinement. Seizing my bag I started, and, as Ireached the front door, I thought that I heard Sir John, who was nownearly at the foot of the stairs, call out something to me. I answeredthat I couldn't stop but would see him later, to which I understood himto reply "All right."

This was about three o'clock in the afternoon, but so protracted andanxious was the case of Lady Colford that I did not reach home againtill eight. Having swallowed a little food, for I was thoroughlyexhausted, I went upstairs to see my wife. Entering the room softly Ifound that she was asleep, and that the nurse also was dozing on thesofa in the dressing-room. Fearing to disturb them, I kissed her lips,and going downstairs returned at once to Sir Thomas Colford's house,where I spent the entire night in attendance on his wife.

When I came home again about eight o'clock on the following morning itwas to find Sir John Bell awaiting me in the consulting-room. A glanceat his face told me that there was something dreadfully wrong.

"What is it?" I asked.

"What is it? Why, what I called after you yesterday, only you wouldn'tstop to listen, and I haven't known where to find you since. It'spuerperal fever, and Heaven knows what gave it to her, for I don't. Ithought so yesterday, and this morning I am sure of it."

"Puerperal fever," I muttered, "then I am ruined, whatever happens toEmma."

"Don't talk like that, man," answered Sir John, "she has a capitalconstitution, and, I daresay, we shall pull her through."

"You don't understand. I have been attending Lady Colford, goingstraight from Emma's room to her."

Sir John whistled. "Oh, indeed. Certainly, that's awkward. Well, we musthope for the best, and, look you here, when a fellow calls out to youanother time just you stop to listen."

To dwell on all that followed would serve no good purpose, and indeedwhat is the use of setting down the details of so much forgotten misery?In a week my beloved wife was dead, and in ten days Lady Colford hadfollowed her into the darkness. Then it was, that to complete my owndestruction, I committed an act of folly, for, meeting Sir John Bell, inmy mad grief I was fool enough to tell him I knew that

my wife's death,and indirectly that of Lady Colford, were due to his improper treatmentand neglect of precautions.

I need not enter into the particulars, but this in fact was the case.

He did not say much in answer to my accusation, but merely replied:--

"I make allowances for you; but, Dr. Therne, it is time that somebodytaught you that people's reputations cannot be slandered with impunity.Instead of attacking me I should recommend you to think of defendingyourself."

Very soon I learned the meaning of this hint. I think it was within aweek of my wife's funeral that I heard that Sir Thomas Colford, togetherwith all his relations and those of the deceased lady, were absolutelyfurious with me. Awaking from my stupor of grief, I wrote a letter toSir Thomas expressing my deep regret at the misfortune that I had beenthe innocent means of bringing upon him. To this letter I received areply by hand, scrawled upon half a sheet of notepaper. It ran:--

"Sir Thomas Colford is surprised that Dr. Therne should think it worthwhile to add falsehood to murder."

Then, for the first time, I understood in what light my terriblemisfortune was regarded by the public. A few days later I receivedfurther enlightenment, this time from the lips of an inspector ofpolice, who called upon me with a warrant of arrest on the charge ofhaving done manslaughter on the body of Dame Blanche Colford.

That night I spent in Dunchester Jail, and next morning I was broughtbefore the bench of magistrates, who held a special session to try mycase. The chairman, whom I knew well, very kindly asked me if I did notwish for legal assistance. I replied, "No, I have nothing to defend,"which he seemed to think a hard saying, at any rate he looked surprised.On the other side counsel were employed nominally on behalf of theCrown, although in reality the prosecution, which in such a case wasunusual if not unprecedented, had been set on foot and undertaken by theColford family.

The "information" was read by the clerk, in which I was charged withculpable negligence and wilfully doing certain things that caused thedeath of Blanche Colford. I stood there in the dock listening, andwondering what possible evidence could be adduced against me in supportof such a charge. After the formal witnesses, relations and doctors, whotestified to my being called in to attend on Lady Colford, to the courseof the illness and the cause of death, etc., Sir John Bell was called."Now," I thought to myself, "this farce will come to an end, for Bellwill explain the facts."

The counsel for the prosecution began by asking Sir John variousquestions concerning the terrible malady known as puerperal fever, andespecially with reference to its contagiousness. Then he passed on tothe events of the day when I was called in to attend upon Lady Colford.Sir John described how he had visited my late wife, and, from varioussymptoms which she had developed somewhat suddenly, to his grief andsurprise, had come to the conclusion that she had fallen victim topuerperal fever. This evidence, to begin with, was not true, foralthough he suspected the ailment on that afternoon he was not sure ofit until the following morning.

"What happened then, Sir John?" asked the counsel.

"Leaving my patient I hurried downstairs to see Dr. Therne, and foundhim just stepping from his consulting-room into the hall."

"Did he speak to you?"

"Yes. He said 'How do you do?' and then added, before I could tell himabout his wife, 'I am rather in luck to-day; they are calling me into take Lady Colford's case.' I said I was glad to hear it, but that Ithought he had better let some one else attend her ladyship. He lookedastonished, and asked why. I said, 'Because, my dear fellow, I am afraidthat your wife has developed puerperal fever, and the nurse tellsme that you were in her room not long ago.' He replied that it wasimpossible, as he had looked at her and thought her all right except fora little headache. I said that I trusted that I might be wrong, but ifnearly forty years' experience went for anything I was not wrong. Thenhe flew into a passion, and said that if anything was the matter withhis wife it was my fault, as I must have brought the contagion orneglected to take the usual antiseptic precautions. I told him thathe should not make such statements without an atom of proof, but,interrupting me, he declared that, fever or no fever, he would attendupon Lady Colford, as he could not afford to throw away the best chancehe had ever had. I said, 'My dear fellow, don't be mad. Why, if anythinghappened to her under the circumstances, I believe that, after I havewarned you, you would be liable to be criminally prosecuted for culpablenegligence.' 'Thank you,' he answered, 'nothing will happen to her, Iknow my own business, and I will take the chance of that'; and then,before I could speak again, lifting up his bag from the chair on whichhe had placed it, he opened the front door and went out."

I will not attempt, especially after this lapse of years, to describethe feelings with which I listened to this amazing evidence. The blackwickedness and the cold-blooded treachery of the man overwhelmed andparalysed me, so that when, after some further testimony, the chairmanasked me if I had any questions to put to

the witness, I could onlystammer:--

"It is a lie, an infamous lie!"

"No, no," said the chairman kindly, "if you wish to make a statement,you will have an opportunity of doing so presently. Have you anyquestions to ask the witness?"

I shook my head. How could I question him on such falsehoods? Then camethe nurse, who, amidst a mass of other information, calmly swore that,standing on the second landing, whither she had accompanied Sir Johnfrom his patient's room, she heard a lengthy conversation proceedingbetween him and me, and caught the words, "I will take the chance ofthat," spoken in my voice.

Again I had no questions to ask, but I remembered that this nurse was aperson who for a long while had been employed by Sir John Bell, and oneover whom he very probably had some hold.

Then I was asked if I had any witness, but, now that my wife was dead,what witness could I call?--indeed, I could not have called her hadshe been alive. Then, having been cautioned in the ordinary form, thatwhatever I said might be given as evidence against me at my trial, I wasasked if I wished to make any statement.

I did make a statement of the facts so far as I knew them, adding thatthe evidence of Sir John Bell and the nurse was a tissue of falsehoods,and that the former had been my constant enemy ever since I began topractise in Dunchester, and more especially since the issue of a certaincase, in the treatment of which I had proved him to be wrong. When mystatement had been taken down and I had signed it, the chairman, aftera brief consultation with his companions, announced that, as thoseconcerned had thought it well to institute this prosecution, in the faceof the uncontradicted evidence of Sir John Bell the bench had no optionbut to send me to take my trial at the Dunchester Assizes, which were tobe held on that day month. In order, however, to avoid the necessityof committing me to jail, they would be prepared to take bail for myappearance in a sum of 500 pounds from myself, and 500 pounds, in twosureties of 250 pounds, or one of the whole amount.

Now I looked about me helplessly, for I had no relations in Dunchester,where I had not lived long enough to form friends sufficiently trueto be willing to thus identify themselves publicly with a man in greattrouble.

"Thank you for your kindness," I said, "but I think that I must go toprison, for I do not know whom to ask to go bail for me."

As I spoke there was a stir at the back of the crowded court, and anungentle voice called out, "I'll go bail for you, lad."

"Step forward whoever spoke," said the clerk, and a man advanced to thetable.

He was a curious and not very healthy-looking person of about fiftyyears of age, ill-dressed in seedy black clothes and a flaming red tie,with a fat, pale face, a pugnacious mouth, and a bald head, on the topof which isolated hairs stood up stiffly. I knew him by sight, for oncehe had argued with me at a lecture I gave on sanitary matters, when Iwas told that he was a draper by trade, and, although his shop was byno means among the most important, that he was believed to be one of therichest men in Dunchester. Also he was a fierce faddist and a pillar ofstrength to the advanced wing of the Radical party.

"What is your name?" asked a clerk.

"Look you here, young man," he answered, "don't have the impertinenceto try your airs and graces on with me. Seeing that you've owed me 24pounds 3s. 6d. for the last three years for goods supplied, you knowwell enough what my name is, or if you don't I will show it to you atthe bottom of a county court summons."

"It is my duty to ask you your name," responded the disconcerted clerkwhen the laughter which this sally provoked had subsided.

"Oh, very well. Stephen Strong is my name, and I may tell you that it isgood at the bottom of a cheque for any reasonable amount. Well, I'm hereto go bail for that young man. I know nothing of him except that I puthim on his back in a ditch in an argument we had one night last winterin the reading-room yonder. I don't know whether he infected the ladyor whether he didn't, but I do know, that like most of the poisoningcalf-worshipping crowd who call themselves Vaccinators, this Bell is aliar, and that if he did, it wasn't his fault because it was God's willthat she should die, and he'd a been wrong to try and interfere withHim. So name your sum and I'll stand the shot."

All of this tirade had been said, or rather shouted, in a strident voiceand in utter defiance of the repeated orders of the chairman that heshould be silent. Mr. Stephen Strong was not a person very amenable toauthority. Now, however, when he had finished his say he not only filledin the bail bond but offered to hand up a cheque for 500 pounds then andthere.

When it was over I thanked him, but he only answered:--

"Don't you thank me. I do it because I will not see folk locked upfor this sort of nonsense about diseases and the like, as though theAlmighty who made us don't know when to send sickness and when to keepit away, when to make us live and when to make us die. Now do you wantany money to defend yourself with?"

I answered that I did not, and, having thanked him again, we partedwithout more words, as I was in no mood to enter into an argument withan enthusiast of this hopeless, but to me, convenient nature.

CHAPTER V - THE TRIAL

Although it took place so long ago, I suppose that a good many peoplestill remember the case of "The Queen versus Therne," which attracteda great deal of attention at the time. The prosecution, as I have said,was set on foot by the relations of the deceased Lady Colford, who,being very rich and powerful people, were able to secure the advocacyof one of the most eminent criminal lawyers of the day, with whom werebriefed sundry almost equally eminent juniors. Indeed no trouble orexpense was spared that could help to ensure my conviction.

On my behalf also appeared a well-known Q.C., and with him two juniors.The judge who tried the case was old and experienced but had thereputation of being severe, and from its very commencement I could seethat the perusal of the depositions taken in the magistrates' court,where it will be remembered I was not defended, had undoubtedly biasedhis mind against me. As for the jury, they were a respectable-lookingquiet set of men, who might be relied upon to do justice according totheir lights. Of those who were called from the panel and answered totheir names two, by the way, were challenged by the Crown and rejectedbecause, I was told, they were professed anti-vaccinationists.

On the appointed day and hour, speaking in a very crowded court, counselfor the Crown opened the case against me, demonstrating clearly thatin the pursuit of my own miserable ends I had sacrificed the life of ayoung, high-placed and lovely fellow-creature, and brought bereavementand desolation upon her husband and family. Then he proceeded to callevidence, which was practically the same as that which had been givenbefore the magistrates, although the husband and Lady Colford's nursewere examined, and, on my behalf, cross-examined at far greater length.

After the adjournment for lunch Sir John Bell was put into thewitness-box, where, with a little additional detail, he repeated almostword for word what he had said before. Listening to him my heart sank,for he made an excellent witness, quiet, self-contained, and, to allappearance, not a little affected by the necessity under which he foundhimself of exposing the evil doings of a brother practitioner. I noticedwith dismay also that his evidence produced a deep effect upon the mindsof all present, judge and jury not excepted.

Then came the cross-examination, which certainly was a brilliantperformance, for under it were shown that from the beginning Sir JohnBell had certainly borne me ill-will; that to his great chagrin I hadproved myself his superior in a medical controversy, and that thefever which my wife contracted was in all human

probability due to hiscarelessness and want of precautions while in attendance upon her. Whenthis cross-examination was concluded the court rose for the day, and,being on bail, I escaped from the dock until the following morning.

I returned to my house and went up to the nursery to see the baby, whowas a very fine and healthy infant. At first I could scarcely bear tolook at this child, remembering always that indirectly it had been thecause of its dear mother's death. But now, when I was so lonely, foreven those who called themselves my friends had fallen away from me inthe time of trial, I felt drawn towards the helpless little thing.

I kissed it and put it back into its cradle, and was about to leavethe room when the nurse, a respectable widow woman with a motherly air,asked me straight out what were my wishes about the child and by whatname it was to be baptised, seeing that when I was in jail she might notbe able to ascertain them. The good woman's question made me wince,but, recognising that in view of eventualities these matters must bearranged, I took a sheet of paper and wrote down my instructions, whichwere briefly that the child should be named Emma Jane after its motherand mine, and that the nurse, Mrs. Baker, should take it to her cottage,and be paid a weekly sum for its maintenance.

Having settled these disagreeable details I went downstairs, but not tothe dinner that was waiting for me, as after the nurse's questions I didnot feel equal to facing the other domestics. Leaving the house I walkedabout the streets seeking some small eating-place where I could dinewithout being recognised. As I wandered along wearily I heard a harshvoice behind me calling me by name, and, turning, found that the speakerwas Mr. Stephen Strong. Even in the twilight there was no possibility ofmistaking his flaming red tie.

"You are worried and tired, doctor," said the harsh voice. "Why ain'tyou with your friends, instead of tramping the streets after that longday in court?"

"Because I have no friends left," I answered, for I had arrived at thatstage of humiliation when a man no longer cares to cloak the truth.

A look of pity passed over Mr. Strong's fat face, and the lines aboutthe pugnacious mouth softened a little.

"Is that so?" he said. "Well, young man, you're learning now whathappens to those who put their faith in fashionable folk and not in theLord. Rats can't scuttle from a sinking ship faster than fashionablefolk from a friend in trouble. You come along and have a bit of supperwith me and my missis. We're humble trades-folk, but, perhaps as thingsare, you won't mind that."

I accepted Mr. Strong's invitation with gratitude, indeed his kindnesstouched me. Leading me to his principal shop, we passed through itand down a passage to a sitting-room heavily furnished with solidhorsehair-seated chairs and a sofa. In the exact centre of this sofa,reading by the light of a lamp with a pink shade which was placed on atable behind her, sat a prim grey-haired woman dressed in a black silkdress and apron and a lace cap with lappets. I noticed at once that theright lappet was larger than the left. Evidently it had been made sowith the design of hiding a patch of affected skin below the ear, whichlooked to me as though it had been caused by the malady called lupus.I noticed further that the little woman was reading an anti-vaccinationtract with a fearful picture of a diseased arm upon its cover.

"Martha," said Mr. Strong, "Dr. Therne, whom they're trying at the courtyonder, has come in for supper. Dr. Therne, that's my wife."

Mrs. Strong rose and offered her hand. She was a thin person, withrather refined features, a weak mouth, and kindly blue eyes.

"I'm sure you are welcome," she said in a small monotonous voice. "Anyof Stephen's friends are welcome, and more especially those of them whoare suffering persecution for the Right."

"That is not exactly my case, madam," I answered, "for if I had donewhat they accuse me of I should deserve hanging, but I did not do it."

"I believe you, doctor," she said, "for you have true eyes. Also Stephensays so. But in any case the death of the dear young woman was God'swill, and if it was God's will, how can you be responsible?"

While I was wondering what answer I should make to this strange doctrinea servant girl announced that supper was ready, and we went into thenext room to partake of a meal, plain indeed, but of most excellentquality. Moreover, I was glad to find, unlike his wife, who touchednothing but water, that Mr. Strong did not include teetotalism amonghis eccentricities. On the contrary, he produced a bottle of really fineport for my especial benefit.

In the course of our conversation I discovered that the Strongs, whohad had no children, devoted themselves to the propagation of various"fads." Mr. Strong indeed was anti-everything, but, which is ratheruncommon in such a man, had no extraneous delusions; that is to say, hewas not a Christian Scientist, or a Blavatskyist, or a Great Pyramidist.Mrs. Strong, however, had never got farther than anti-vaccination, toher a holy cause, for she set down the skin disease with

which she wasconstitutionally afflicted to the credit, or discredit, of vaccinationpractised upon her in her youth. Outside of this great and absorbingsubject her mind occupied itself almost entirely with that well-knownbut most harmless of the crazes, the theory that we Anglo-Saxons are theprogeny of the ten lost Tribes of Israel.

Steering clear of anti-vaccination, I showed an intelligent sympathywith her views and deductions concerning the ten Tribes, which sopleased the gentle little woman that, forgetting the uncertainty of myfuture movements, she begged me to come and see her as often as I liked,and in the meanwhile presented me with a pile of literature connectedwith the supposed wanderings of the Tribes. Thus began my acquaintancewith my friend and benefactress, Martha Strong.

At ten o'clock on the following morning I returned to the dock, and thenurse repeated her evidence in corroboration of Sir John's testimony.A searching cross-examination showed her not to be a very trustworthyperson, but on this particular point it was impossible to shake herstory, because there was no standing ground from which it could beattacked. Then followed some expert evidence whereby, amongst otherthings, the Crown proved to the jury the fearfully contagious nature ofpuerperal fever, which closed the case for the prosecution. After thismy counsel, reserving his address, called the only testimony I was ina position to produce, that of several witnesses to character and tomedical capacity.

When the last of these gentlemen, none of whom were cross-examined,stood down, my counsel addressed the Court, pointing out that my mouthbeing closed by the law of the land--for this trial took place beforethe passing of the Criminal Evidence Act--I was unable to go into thebox and give on oath my version of what had really happened in thismatter. Nor could I produce any witnesses to disprove the story whichhad been told against me, because, unhappily, no third person waspresent at the crucial moments. Now, this story rested entirely on theevidence of Sir John Bell and the nurse, and if it was true I must bemad as well as bad, since a doctor of my ability would well know thatunder the circumstances he would very probably carry contagion, with theresult that a promising professional career might be ruined. Moreover,had he determined to risk it, he would have taken extra precautions inthe sick-room to which he was called, and this it was proved I had notdone. Now the statement made by me before the magistrates had been putin evidence, and in it I said that the tale was an absolute inventionon the part of Sir John Bell, and that when I went to see Lady ColfordI had no knowledge whatsoever that my wife was suffering from aninfectious ailment. This, he submitted, was the true version of thestory, and he confidently asked the jury not

to blast the career ofan able and rising man, but by their verdict to reinstate him in theposition which he had temporarily and unjustly lost.

In reply, the leading counsel for the Crown said that it was neitherhis wish nor his duty to strain the law against me, or to put a worseinterpretation upon the facts than they would bear under the strictestscrutiny. He must point out, however, that if the contention of hislearned friend were correct, Sir John Bell was one of the wickedestvillains who ever disgraced the earth.

In summing up the judge took much the same line. The case, that was of acharacter upon which it was unusual though perfectly allowable to founda criminal prosecution, he pointed out, rested solely upon the evidenceof Sir John Bell, corroborated as it was by the nurse. If thatevidence was correct, then, to satisfy my own ambition or greed, I haddeliberately risked and, as the issue showed, had taken the life of alady who in all confidence was entrusted to my care. Incredible as suchwickedness might seem, the jury must remember that it was by no meansunprecedented. At the same time there was a point that had been scarcelydwelt upon by counsel to which he would call their attention. Accordingto Sir John Bell's account, it was from his lips that I first learnedthat my wife was suffering from a peculiarly dangerous ailment. Yet, inhis report of the conversation that followed between us, which he gavepractically verbatim, I had not expressed a single word of surprise andsorrow at this dreadful intelligence, which to an affectionate husbandwould be absolutely overwhelming. As it had been proved by the evidenceof the nurse and elsewhere that my relations with my young wife werethose of deep affection, this struck him as a circumstance so peculiarthat he was inclined to think that in this particular Sir John's memorymust be at fault.

There was, however, a wide difference between assuming that a portionof the conversation had escaped a witness's memory and disbelieving allthat witness's evidence. As the counsel for the Crown had said, if hehad not, as he swore, warned me, and I had not, as he swore, refused tolisten to his warning, then Sir John Bell was a moral monster. That he,Sir John, at the beginning of my career in Dunchester had shown someprejudice and animus against me was indeed admitted. Doubtless, beinghuman, he was not pleased at the advent of a brilliant young rival, whovery shortly proceeded to prove him in the wrong in the instance of oneof his own patients, but that he had conquered this feeling, as a man ofgenerous impulses would naturally do, appeared to be clear from the factthat he had volunteered to attend upon that rival's wife in her illness.

From all these facts the jury would draw what inferences seemed justto them, but he for one found it difficult to ask them to includeamong these the inference that a man who for more than a generation hadoccupied a very high position among

them, whose reputation, both in andout of his profession, was great, and who had received a special mark offavour from the Crown, was in truth an evil-minded and most malevolentperjurer. Yet, if the statement of the accused was to be accepted, thatwould appear to be the case. Of course, however, there remained thepossibility that in the confusion of a hurried interview I might havemisunderstood Sir John Bell's words, or that he might have misunderstoodmine, or, lastly, as had been suggested, that having come to theconclusion that Sir John could not possibly form a trustworthy opinionon the nature of my wife's symptoms without awaiting their furtherdevelopment, I had determined to neglect advice, in which, as a doctormyself, I had no confidence.

This was the gist of his summing up, but, of course, there was a greatdeal more which I have not set down. The jury, wishing to considertheir verdict, retired, an example that was followed by the judge. Hisdeparture was the signal for an outburst of conversation in the crowdedcourt, which hummed like a hive of startled bees. The superintendent ofpolice, who, I imagine, had his own opinion of Sir John Bell and of thevalue of his evidence, very kindly placed a chair for me in the dock,and there on that bad eminence I sat to be studied by a thousand curiousand for the most part unsympathetic eyes. Lady Colford had been verypopular. Her husband and relations, who were convinced of my guiltand sought to be avenged upon me, were very powerful, therefore thefashionable world of Dunchester, which was doctored by Sir John Bell,was against me almost to a woman.

The jury were long in coming back, and in time I accustomed myselfto the staring and comments, and began to think out the problem of myposition. It was clear to me that, so far as my future was concerned,it did not matter what verdict the jury gave. In any case I was a ruinedman in this and probably in every other country. And there, opposite tome, sat the villain who with no excuse of hot blood or the pressure ofsudden passion, had deliberately sworn away my honour and livelihood. Hewas chatting easily to one of the counsel for the Crown, when presentlyhe met my eyes and in them read my thoughts. I suppose that the man hada conscience somewhere; probably, indeed, his treatment of me had notbeen premeditated, but was undertaken in a hurry to save himself fromwell-merited attack. The lie once told there was no escape for him, whohenceforth must sound iniquity to its depths.

Suddenly, in the midst of his conversation, Sir John became silent andhis lips turned pale and trembled; then, remarking abruptly that hecould waste no more time on this miserable business, he rose and leftthe court. Evidently the barrister to whom he was talking had observedto what this change of demeanour was due, for he looked first at me inthe dock and next at Sir John Bell as, recovering his pomposity, he madehis way through the crowd. Then he grew reflective, and

pushing his wigback from his forehead he stared at the ceiling and whistled to himselfsoftly.

It was very evident that the jury found a difficulty in making up theirminds, for minute after minute went by and still they did not return.Indeed, they must have been absent quite an hour and a half whensuddenly the superintendent of police removed the chair which he hadgiven me and informed me that "they" were coming.

With a curious and impersonal emotion, as a man might consider a casein which he had no immediate concern, I studied their faces while oneby one they filed into the box. The anxiety had been so great and soprolonged that I rejoiced it was at length coming to its end, whateverthat end might be.

The judge having returned to his seat on the bench, in the midst of themost intense silence the clerk asked the jury whether they found theprisoner guilty or not guilty. Rising to his feet, the foreman, a dapperlittle man with a rapid utterance, said, or rather read from a piece ofpaper, "Not guilty, but we hope that in future Dr. Therne will be morecareful about conveying infection."

"That is a most improper verdict," broke in the judge with irritation,"for it acquits the accused and yet implies that he is guilty. Dr.Therne, you are discharged. I repeat that I regret that the jury shouldhave thought fit to add a very uncalled-for rider to their verdict."

I left the dock and pushed my way through the crowd. Outside thecourt-house I came face to face with Sir Thomas Colford. A suddenimpulse moved me to speak to him.

"Sir Thomas," I began, "now that I have been acquitted by a jury----"

"Pray, Dr. Therne," he broke in, "say no more, for the less said thebetter. It is useless to offer explanations to a man whose wife you havemurdered."

"But, Sir Thomas, that is false. When I visited Lady Colford I knewnothing of my wife's condition."

"Sir," he replied, "in this matter I have to choose between the word ofSir John Bell, who, although unfortunately my wife did not like him asa doctor, has been my friend for over twenty years, and your word, withwhom I have been acquainted for one year. Under these circumstances, Ibelieve Sir John Bell, and that you are a guilty man. Nine people outof every ten in Dunchester believe this, and, what is more, the jurybelieved it also, although for reasons which are easily

to be understoodthey showed mercy to you," and, turning on his heel, he walked away fromme.

I also walked away to my own desolate home, and, sitting down in theempty consulting-room, contemplated the utter ruin that had overtakenme. My wife was gone and my career was gone, and to whatever part of theearth I might migrate an evil reputation would follow me. And all thisthrough no fault of mine.

Whilst I still sat brooding a man was shown into the room, a smilinglittle black-coated person, in whom I recognised the managing clerk ofthe firm of solicitors that had conducted the case for the prosecution.

"Not done with your troubles yet, Dr. Therne, I fear," he saidcheerfully; "out of the criminal wood into the civil swamp," and helaughed as he handed me a paper.

"What is this?" I asked.

"Statement of claim in the case of Colford v. Therne; damages laid at10,000 pounds, which, I daresay, you will agree is not too much for theloss of a young wife. You see, doctor, Sir Thomas is downright wild withyou, and so are all the late lady's people. As he can't lock you up,he intends to ruin you by means of an action. If he had listened to me,that is what he would have begun with, leaving the criminal law alone.It's a nasty treacherous thing is the criminal law, and you can't besure of your man however black things may look against him. I neverthought they could convict you, doctor, never; for, as the old judgesaid, you see it is quite unusual to prosecute criminally in cases ofthis nature, and the jury won't send a man to jail for a little mistakeof the sort. But they will 'cop' you in damages, a thousand or fifteenhundred, and then the best thing that you can do will be to go bankrupt,or perhaps you had better clear before the trial comes on."

I groaned aloud, but the little man went on cheerfully:--

"Same solicitors, I suppose? I'll take the other things to them so asnot to bother you more than I can help. Good-afternoon; I'm downrightglad that they didn't convict you, and as for old Bell, he's as mad as ahatter, though of course everybody knows what the jury meant--the judgewas pretty straight about it, wasn't he?--he chooses to think that itamounts to calling him a liar. Well, now I come to think of it, thereare one or two things--so perhaps he is. Good-afternoon, doctor. Let'ssee, you have the original and I will take the duplicate," and hevanished.

When the clerk had gone I went on thinking. Things were worse than I hadbelieved, for it seemed that I was not even clear of my legal troubles.Already

this trial had cost me a great deal, and I was in no positionto stand the financial strain of a second appearance in the law courts.Also the man was right; although I had been acquitted on the criminalcharge, if the same evidence were given by Sir John Bell and the nursein a civil action, without any manner of doubt I should be cast in heavydamages. Well, I could only wait and see what happened.

But was it worth while? Was anything worth while? The world had treatedme very cruelly; a villain had lied away my reputation and the worldbelieved him, so that henceforth I must be one of its outcasts andblack sheep; an object of pity and contempt among the members of myprofession. It was doubtful whether, having been thus exposed and madebankrupt, I could ever again obtain a respectable practice. Indeed, themost that I might hope for would be some small appointment on the westcoast of Africa, or any other poisonous place, which no one else wouldbe inclined to accept, where I might live--until I died.

The question that occurred to me that evening was whether it would notbe wiser on the whole to accept defeat, own myself beaten, and ringdown the curtain--not a difficult matter for a doctor to deal with. Thearguments for such a course were patent; what were those against it?

The existence of my child? Well, by the time that she grew up, if shelived to grow up, all the trouble and scandal would be forgotten, andthe effacement of a discredited parent could be no great loss to her.Moreover, my life was insured for 3000 pounds in an office that took therisk of suicide.

Considerations of religion? These had ceased to have any weight with me.I was brought up to believe in a good and watching Providence, but theevents of the last few months had choked that belief. If there was a Godwho guarded us, why should He have allowed the existence of my wife tobe sacrificed to the carelessness, and all my hopes to the villainy, ofSir John Bell? The reasoning was inconclusive, perhaps--for who can knowthe ends of the Divinity?--but it satisfied my mind at the time, and forthe rest I have never really troubled to reopen the question.

The natural love of life for its own sake? It had left me. What more hadlife to offer? Further, what is called "love of life" frequently enoughis little more than fear of the hereafter or of death, and of thephysical act of death I had lost my terror, shattered as I was by sorrowand shame. Indeed, at that moment I could have welcomed it gladly, sinceto me it meant the perfect rest of oblivion.

So in the end I determined that I would leave this lighted house of Lifeand go out into the dark night, and at once. Unhappy was it for me andfor hundreds of other human beings that the decree of fate, or chance,brought my designs to nothing.

First I wrote a letter to be handed to the reporters at the inquest forpublication in the newspapers, in which I told the true story of LadyColford's case and denounced Bell as a villain whose perjury had drivenme to self-murder. After this I wrote a second letter, to be given tomy daughter if she lived to come to years of discretion, setting out thefacts that brought me to my end and asking her to pardon me for havingleft her. This done it seemed that my worldly business was completed, soI set about leaving the world.

Going to a medicine chest I reflected a little. Finally I decided onprussic acid; its after effects are unpleasant but its action is swiftand certain. What did it matter to me if I turned black and smelt ofalmonds when I was dead?

CHAPTER VI - THE GATE OF DARKNESS

Taking the phial from the chest I poured an ample but not an over doseof the poison into a medicine glass, mixing it with a little water, sothat it might be easier to swallow. I lingered as long as I could overthese preparations, but they came to an end too soon.

Now there seemed to be nothing more to do except to transfer that littlemeasure of white fluid from the glass to my mouth, and thus to openthe great door at whose bolts and bars we stare blankly from the day ofbirth to the day of death. Every panel of that door is painted with adifferent picture touched to individual taste. Some are beautiful, andsome are grim, and some are neutral-tinted and indefinite. My favouritepicture used to be one of a boat floating on a misty ocean, and in theboat a man sleeping--myself, dreaming happily, dreaming always.

But that picture had gone now, and in place of it was one of blackness,not the tumultuous gloom of a stormy night, but dead, cold, unfathomableblackness. Without a doubt that was what lay behind the door--onlythat. So soon as ever my wine was swallowed and those mighty hingesbegan to turn I should see a wall of blackness thrusting itself'twixt door and lintel. Yes, it would creep forward, now pausing, nowadvancing, until at length it wrapped me round and stifled out my breathlike a death mask of cold clay. Then sight would die and sound would dieand to all eternities there would be silence, silence while the starsgrew old and crumbled, silence while they took form again far in thevoid, for ever and for ever dumb, dreadful, conquering silence.

That was the only real picture, the rest were mere efforts of theimagination. And yet, what if some of them were also true? What if thefinished landscape that lay beyond the doom-door was but developed fromthe faint sketch traced by the strivings of our spirit--to each manhis own picture, but filled in, perfected, vivified a thousandfold, forterror or for joy perfect and inconceivable?

The thought was fascinating, but not without its fears. It wasstrange that a man who had abandoned hopes should still be haunted byfears--like everything else in the world, this is unjust. For a littlewhile, five or ten minutes, not more than ten, I would let my mind dwellon that thought, trying to dig down to its roots which doubtless drewtheir strength from the foetid slime of human superstition, trying tobehold its topmost branches where they waved in sparkling light. No,that was not the theory; I must imagine those invisible branches asgrim skeletons of whitened wood, standing stirless in that atmosphere ofoverwhelming night.

So I sat myself in a chair, placing the medicine glass with the draughtof bane upon the table before me, and, to make sure that I did notexceed the ten minutes, near to it my travelling clock. As I sat thusI fell into a dream or vision. I seemed to see myself standing upon theworld, surrounded by familiar sights and sounds. There in the west thesun sank in splendour, and the sails of a windmill that turned slowlybetween its orb and me were now bright as gold, and now by contrastblack as they dipped into the shadow. Near the windmill was a cornfield,and beyond the cornfield stood a cottage whence came the sound of lowingcattle and the voices of children. Down a path that ran through theripening corn walked a young man and a maid, their arms twined abouteach other, while above their heads a lark poured out its song.

But at my very feet this kindly earth and all that has life upon itvanished quite away, and there in its place, seen through a giantportal, was the realm of darkness that I had pictured--darkness soterrible, so overpowering, and so icy that my living blood froze atthe sight of it. Presently something stirred in the darkness, for ittrembled like shaken water. A shape came forward to the edge of thegateway so that the light of the setting sun fell upon it, making itvisible. I looked and knew that it was the phantom of my lost wifewrapped in her last garments. There she stood, sad and eager-faced, withquick-moving lips, from which no echo reached my ears. There she stood,beating the air with her hands as though to bar that path againstme. . . .

I awoke with a start, to see standing over against me in the gloom ofthe doorway, not the figure of my wife come from the company of the deadwith warning on her lips, but that of Stephen Strong. Yes, it was he,for the light of the candle that I had lit when I went to seek the drugfell full upon his pale face and large bald head.

"Hullo, doctor," he said in his harsh but not unkindly voice, "having anip and a nap, eh? What's your tipple? Hollands it looks, but it smellsmore like peach brandy. May I taste it? I'm a judge of hollands," and helifted the glass of prussic acid and water from the table.

In an instant my dazed faculties were awake, and with a swift motion Ihad knocked the glass from his hand, so that it fell upon the floor andwas shattered.

"Ah!" he said, "I thought so. And now, young man, perhaps you willtell me why you were playing a trick like that?"

"Why?" I answered bitterly. "Because my wife is dead; because my nameis disgraced; because my career is ruined; because they have commenced anew action against me, and, if I live, I must become a bankrupt----"

"And you thought that you could make all these things better by killingyourself. Doctor, I didn't believe that you were such a fool. You sayyou have done nothing to be ashamed of, and I believe you. Well, then,what does it matter what these folk think? For the rest, when a manfinds himself in a tight place, he shouldn't knock under, he shouldfight his way through. You're in a tight place, I know, but I was oncein a tighter, yes, I did what you have nearly done--I went to jail on afalse charge and false evidence. But I didn't commit suicide. I servedmy time, and I think it crazed me a bit though it was only a month; atany rate, I was what they call a crank when I came out, which I wasn'twhen I went in. Then I set to work and showed up those for whom I haddone time--living or dead they'll never forget Stephen Strong, I'llwarrant--and after that I turned to and became the head of the Radicalparty and one of the richest men in Dunchester; why, I might have beenin Parliament half a dozen times over if I had chosen, although I amonly a draper. Now, if I have done all this, why can't you, who havetwice my brains and education, do as much?

"Nobody will employ you? I will find folk who will employ you. Actionfor damages? I'll stand the shot of that however it goes; I love alawsuit, and a thousand or two won't hurt me. And now I came round hereto ask you to supper, and I think you'll be better drinking port withStephen Strong than hell-fire with another tradesman, whom I won't name.Before we go, however, just give me your word of honour that there shallbe no more of this sort of thing," and he pointed to the broken glass,"now or afterwards, as I don't want to be mixed up with inquests."

"I promise," I answered presently.

"That will do," said Mr. Strong, as he led the way to the door.

I need not dwell upon the further events of that evening, inasmuchas they were almost a repetition of those of the previous night.Mrs. Strong received me kindly in her faded fashion, and, after a fewinquiries about the trial, sought refuge in her favourite topic of thelost Tribes. Indeed, I remember that she was rather put out because Ihad not already mastered the books and pamphlets which she had givenme. In the end, notwithstanding the weariness of her feeble folly, Ireturned home in much better spirits.

For the next month or two nothing of note happened to me, except indeedthat the action for damages brought against me by Sir Thomas Colfordwas suddenly withdrawn. Although it never transpired publicly, I believethat the true reason of this collapse was that Sir John Bell flatlyrefused to appear in court and submit himself to further examination,and without Sir John Bell there was no evidence against me. But thewithdrawal of this action did not help me professionally;

indeedthe fine practice which I was beginning to get together had entirelyvanished away. Not a creature came near my consulting-room, and scarcelya creature called me in. The prosecution and the verdict of the jury,amounting as it did to one of "not proven" only, had ruined me. By nowmy small resources were almost exhausted, and I could see that veryshortly the time would come when I should no longer know where to turnfor bread for myself and my child.

One morning as I was sitting in my consulting-room, moodily reading amedical textbook for want of something else to do, the front door bellrang. "A patient at last," I thought to myself with a glow of hope.I was soon undeceived, however, for the servant opened the door andannounced Mr. Stephen Strong.

"How do you do, doctor?" he said briskly. "You will wonder why I am hereat such an hour. Well, it is on business. I want you to come with me tosee two sick children."

"Certainly," I said, and we started.

"Who are the children and what is the matter with them?" I askedpresently.

"Son and daughter of a working boot-maker named Samuels. As to what isthe matter with them, you can judge of that for yourself," he repliedwith a grim smile.

Passing into the poorer part of the city, at length we reached acobbler's shop with a few pairs of roughly-made boots on sale in thewindow. In the shop sat Mr. Samuels, a dour-looking man of about forty.

"Here is the doctor, Samuels," said Strong.

"All right," he answered, "he'll find the missus and the kids in thereand a pretty sight they are; I can't bear to look at them, I can't."

Passing through the shop, we went into a back room whence came a soundof wailing. Standing in the room was a careworn woman and in the bed laytwo children, aged three and four respectively. I proceeded at onceto my examination, and found that one child, a boy, was in a stateof extreme prostration and fever, the greater part of his body beingcovered with a vivid scarlet rash. The other child, a girl, wassuffering from a terribly red and swollen arm, the inflammation beingmost marked above the elbow. Both were cases of palpable and severeerysipelas, and both of the sufferers had been vaccinated within fivedays.

"Well," said Stephen Strong, "well, what's the matter with them?"

"Erysipelas," I answered.

"And what caused the erysipelas? Was it the vaccination?"

"It may have been the vaccination," I replied cautiously.

"Come here, Samuels," called Strong. "Now, then, tell the doctor yourstory."

"There's precious little story about it," said the poor man, keeping hisback towards the afflicted children. "I have been pulled up three timesand fined because I didn't have the kids vaccinated, not being anybeliever in vaccination myself ever since my sister's boy died of it,with his head all covered with sores. Well, I couldn't pay no morefines, so I told the missus that she might take them to the vaccinationofficer, and she did five or six days ago. And there, that's the endof their vaccination, and damn 'em to hell, say I," and the poor fellowpushed his way out of the room.

It is quite unnecessary that I should follow all the details of this sadcase. In the result, despite everything that I could do for him, the boydied though the girl recovered. Both had been vaccinated from the sametube of lymph. In the end I was able to force the authorities tohave the contents of tubes obtained from the same source examinedmicroscopically and subjected to the culture test. They were proved tocontain the streptococcus or germ of erysipelas.

As may be imagined this case caused a great stir and much publiccontroversy, in which I took an active part. It was seized upon eagerlyby the anti-vaccination party, and I was quoted as the authority forits details. In reply, the other side hinted pretty broadly that I wasa person so discredited that my testimony on this or any othermatter should be accepted with caution, an unjust aspersion which notunnaturally did much to keep me in the enemy's camp. Indeed it was now,when I became useful to a great and rising party, that at length I foundfriends without number, who, not content with giving me their presentsupport, took up the case on account of which I had stood my trial, and,by their energy and the ventilation of its details, did much to show howgreatly I had been wronged. I did not and do not suppose that all thisfriendship was disinterested, but, whatever its motive, it was equallywelcome to a crushed and deserted man.

By slow degrees, and without my making any distinct pronouncement onthe subject, I came to be looked upon as a leading light among the verysmall and select band of anti-vaccinationist men, and as such to studythe question exhaustively. Hearing that I was thus engaged, StephenStrong offered me a

handsome salary, which I suppose came out of hispocket, if I would consent to investigate cases in which vaccinationwas alleged to have resulted in mischief. I accepted the salary since,formally at any rate, it bound me to nothing but a course of inquiries.During a search of two years I established to my satisfaction thatvaccination, as for the most part it was then performed, that is fromarm to arm, is occasionally the cause of blood poisoning, erysipelas,abscesses, tuberculosis, and other dreadful ailments. These cases Ipublished without drawing from them any deductions whatever, with theresult that I found myself summoned to give evidence before the RoyalCommission on Vaccination which was then sitting at Westminster. WhenI had given my evidence, which, each case being well established, couldscarcely be shaken, some members of the Commission attempted to draw meinto general statements as to the advantage or otherwise of the practiceof vaccination to the community. To these gentlemen I replied that asmy studies had been directed towards the effects of vaccination inindividual instances only, the argument was one upon which I preferrednot to enter.

Had I spoken the truth, indeed, I should have confessed my inability tosupport the anti-vaccinationist case, since in my opinion few people whohave studied this question with an open and impartial mind can denythat Jenner's discovery is one of the greatest boons--perhaps, after theintroduction of antiseptics and anaesthetics, the very greatest--thathas ever been bestowed upon suffering humanity.

If the reader has any doubts upon the point, let him imagine a timewhen, as used to happen in the days of our forefathers, almost everybodysuffered from smallpox at some period of their lives, those escapingonly whose blood was so fortified by nature that the disease could nottouch them. Let him imagine a state of affairs--and there are stillpeople living whose parents could remember it--when for a woman not tobe pitted with smallpox was to give her some claim to beauty, howeverhomely might be her features. Lastly, let him imagine what all thismeans: what terror walked abroad when it was common for smallpox tostrike a family of children, and when the parents, themselves thesurvivors of similar catastrophes, knew well that before it left thehouse it would take its tithe of those beloved lives. Let him lookat the brasses in our old churches and among the numbers of childrenrepresented on them as kneeling behind their parents; let him note whata large proportion pray with their hands open. Of these, the most, Ibelieve, were cut off by smallpox. Let him search the registers, andthey will tell the same tale. Let him ask old people of what theirmothers told them when they were young of the working of this pestilencein their youth. Finally, let him consider how it comes about, ifvaccination is a fraud, that some nine hundred and ninety-nine medicalmen out of every thousand, not in England only, but in all civilisedcountries, place so firm a belief in its virtue. Are the doctors ofthe world

all mad, or all engaged in a great conspiracy to suppress thetruth?

These were my real views, as they must be the views of most intelligentand thoughtful men; but I did not think it necessary to promulgate themabroad, since to do so would have been to deprive myself of such meansof maintenance as remained to me. Indeed, in those days I told neithermore nor less than the truth. Evil results occasionally followed the useof bad lymph or unclean treatment after the subject had been inoculated.Thus most of the cases of erysipelas into which I examined arose notfrom vaccination but from the dirty surroundings of the patient. Wound amillion children, however slightly, and let flies settle on the woundor dirt accumulate in it, and the result will be that a certain smallproportion will develop erysipelas quite independently of the effects ofvaccination.

In the same way, some amount of inoculated disease must follow thealmost promiscuous use of lymph taken from human beings. The danger isperfectly preventable, and ought long ago to have been prevented, bymaking it illegal, under heavy penalties, to use any substance exceptthat which has been developed in calves and scientifically treated withglycerine, when, as I believe, no hurt can possibly follow. This is theverdict of science and, as tens of thousands can testify, the commonexperience of mankind.

CHAPTER VII - CROSSING THE RUBICON

My appearance as an expert before the Royal Commission gave meconsiderable importance in the eyes of a large section of theinhabitants of Dunchester. It was not the wealthiest or most influentialsection indeed, although in it were numbered some rich and powerful men.Once again I found myself with a wide and rapidly increasing practice,and an income that was sufficient for my needs. Mankind suffers frommany ailments besides that of smallpox, indeed in Dunchester thisquestion of the value of vaccination was at that time purely academical,as except for an occasional case there had been no outbreak of smallpoxfor years. Now, as I have said, I was a master of my trade, and soonproved myself competent to deal skilfully with such illnesses, surgicalor medical, as I was called upon to treat. Thus my practice grew,especially among the small tradespeople and artisans, who did not belongto clubs, but preferred to pay for a doctor in whom they had confidence.

Three years and more had gone by since that night on which I satopposite to a wine-glass full of poison and was the prey of visions,when once again I received a call from Stephen Strong. With thisgood-hearted, though misguided man, and his amiable, but weak-mindedwife, I had kept up an intimacy that in time ripened into genuinefriendship. On every Sunday night, and sometimes oftener, I took supperwith them, and discussed with Mrs. Strong the important questions of ourdescent from the lost Tribes and whether or no the lupus from which shesuffered was the result of vaccination in infancy.

Owing to a press of patients, to whom I was obliged to attend, I was notable to receive Mr. Strong for nearly half an hour.

"Things are a bit different from what they used to be, doctor," he saidas he entered the room looking much the same as ever, with the exceptionthat now even his last hairs had gone, leaving him completely bald,"there's six more of them waiting there, and all except one can pay afee. Yes, the luck has turned for you since you were called in to attendcobbler Samuels' children, and you haven't seen the top of it yet, I cantell you. Now, what do you think I have come to see you about?"

"Can't say. I give it up."

"Then I will tell you. You saw in yesterday's paper that old brewerHicks, the member for Dunchester, has been raised to the peerage. Iunderstand he told the Government that if they kept him waiting anylonger he would stop his

subscription to the party funds, and as that's5000 pounds a year, they gave in, believing the seat to be a safe one.But that's just where they make their mistake, for if we get the rightman the Rads will win."

"And who is the right man?"

"James Therne, Esq., M.D.," he answered quietly.

"What on earth do you mean?" I asked. "How can I afford to spend from1000 to 2000 pounds upon a contested election, and as much more a yearin subscriptions and keeping up the position if I should chance to bereturned? And how, in the name of fortune, can I be both a practisingphysician and a member of Parliament?"

"I'll tell you, doctor, for, ever since your name was put forward bythe Liberal Council yesterday, I have seen these difficulties and beenthinking them out. Look here, you are still young, handsome, clever,and a capital speaker with a popular audience. Also you are veryhard-working and would rise. But you've no money, and only what youearn at your profession to live on, which, if you were a member ofParliament, you couldn't continue to earn. Well, such a man as you areis wanted and so he must be paid for."

"No, no," I said, "I am not going to be the slave of a Radical FiveHundred, bound to do what they tell me and vote as they like; I'd ratherstick to my own trade, thank you."

"Don't you be in a hurry, young man; who asked you to be any one'sslave? Now, look here--if somebody guarantees every farthing of expenseto fight the seat, and 1200 pounds a year and outgoings if you shouldbe successful, and a bonus of 5000 pounds in the event of your beingsubsequently defeated or electing to give up parliamentary life, willyou take on the job?"

"On those terms, yes, I think so, provided I was sure of the guarantor,and that he was a man from whom I could take the money."

"Well, you can soon judge of that, doctor, for it is I, Samuel Strong,and I'll deposit 10,000 pounds in the hands of a trustee before youwrite your letter of acceptance. No, don't thank me. I do it for tworeasons--first, because, having no chick or kin of my own, I happen tohave taken a fancy to you and wish to push you on. The world has treatedyou badly, and I want to see you one of its masters, with all thesesmart people who look down on you licking your boots, as they willsure enough if you grow rich and powerful. That's my private reason. Mypublic one is that you are the only man in Dunchester who can win us

theseat, and I'd think 10,000 pounds well spent if it put those Tories atthe bottom of the poll. I want to show them who is "boss," and that wewon't be lorded over by bankers and brewers just because they are richmen who have bought themselves titles."

"But you are a rich man yourself," I interrupted.

"Yes, doctor, and I spend my money in helping those who will help thepeople. Now, before you give me any answer, I've got to ask you a thingor two," and he drew a paper from his pocket. "Are you prepared tosupport the abolition of 'tied' houses?"

"Certainly. They are the worst monopoly in England."

"Graduated income-tax?"

"Yes; the individual should pay in proportion to the propertyprotected."

"An Old Age Pension scheme?"

"Yes, but only by means of compulsory insurance applicable to allclasses without exception."

"Disestablishment and Disendowment of the Church?"

"Yes, provided its funds are pooled and reapplied to Church purposes."

"Payment of members and placing the cost of elections on the rates?"

"Yes, the door of Parliament should not be shut in the face of allexcept the very rich. Election expenditure is at present only a veiledform of corruption. If it were put upon the rates it could be reduced byat least a half, and elections would be fewer."

"Home Rule--no, I needn't ask you that, for it is a dead horse which wedon't want to flog, and now-a-days we are all in favour of a bignavy, so I think that is about everything--except, of course,anti-vaccination, which you'll run for all it's worth."

"I never said that I would, Mr. Strong," I answered.

He looked at me curiously. "No, and you never said you wouldn't.Now, doctor, let us come to an understanding about this, for here inDunchester it's worth more than all the other things put together. Ifthis seat is to be won, it will be won on

anti-vaccination. That's ourburning question, and that's why you are being asked to stand, becauseyou've studied the thing and are believed to be one of the few doctorswho don't bow the knee to Baal. So look here, let's understand eachother. If you have any doubts about this matter, say so, and we willhave done with it, for, remember, once you are on the platform you'vegot to go the whole hog; none of your scientific finicking, but appealsto the people to rise up in their thousands and save their innocentchildren from being offered to the Moloch of vaccination, with enlargedphotographs of nasty-looking cases, and the rest of it."

I listened and shivered. The inquiry into rare cases of disease aftervaccination had been interesting work, which, whatever deductions peoplemight choose to draw, in fact committed me to nothing. But to become oneof the ragged little regiment of medical dissenters, to swallow all theunscientific follies of the anti-vaccination agitators, to make myselfresponsible for and to promulgate their distorted figures and wildstatements--ah! that was another thing. Must I appear upon platforms anddenounce this wonderful discovery as the "law of useless infanticide"?Must I tell people that "smallpox is really a curative process and notthe deadly scourge and pestilence that doctors pretend it to be"? Must Imaintain "that vaccination never did, never does, and never can preventeven a single case of smallpox"? Must I hold it up as a "law (!) ofdevil worship and human sacrifice to idols"?

If I accepted Strong's offer it seemed that I must do all thesethings: more, I must be false to my instincts, false to my training andprofession, false to my scientific knowledge. I could not do it. Andyet--when did a man in my position ever get such a chance as that whichwas offered to me this day? I was ready with my tongue and fond ofpublic speaking; from boyhood it had been my desire to enter Parliament,where I knew well that I should show to some advantage. Now, withoutrisk or expense to myself, an opportunity of gratifying this ambitionwas given to me. Indeed, if I succeeded in winning this city, whichhad always been a Tory stronghold, for the Radical party I should be amarked man from the beginning, and if my career was not one of assuredprosperity the fault would be my own. Already in imagination I sawmyself rich (for in this way or in that the money would come),a favourite of the people, a trusted minister of the Crown andperhaps--who could tell?--ennobled, living a life of dignity and repute,and at last leaving my honours and my fame to those who came after me.

On the other hand, if I refused this offer the chance would pass awayfrom me, never to return again; it was probable even that I should loseStephen Strong's friendship and support, for he was not a man who likedhis generosity to be slighted, moreover he would believe me unsound uponhis favourite dogmas. In short, for ever abandoning my brilliant hopesI condemned myself to an experience of struggle as a doctor with apractice among second-class people.

After all, although the thought of it shocked me at first, the price Iwas asked to pay was not so very heavy, merely one of the usual electionplatform formulas, whereby the candidate binds himself to support allsorts of things in which he has little or no beliefs. Already I was halfcommitted to this anti-vaccination crusade, and, if I took a step ortwo farther in it, what did it matter? One crank more added to the greatarmy of British enthusiasts could make little difference in the schemeof things.

If ever a man went through a "psychological moment" in this hour I wasthat man. The struggle was short and sharp, but it ended as might beexpected in the case of one of my history and character. Could I haveforeseen the dreadful issues which hung upon my decision, I believe thatrather than speak it, for the second time in my life I would have soughtthe solace to be found in the phials of my medicine chest. But I didnot foresee them, I thought only of myself, of my own hopes, fears andambitions, forgetting that no man can live to himself alone, and thathis every deed must act and re-act upon others until humanity ceases toexist.

"Well," said Mr. Strong after a two or three minutes' pause, duringwhich these thoughts were wrestling in my mind.

"Well," I answered, "as you elegantly express it, I am prepared to gothe whole hog--it is a case of hog versus calf, isn't it?--or, for thematter of that, a whole styful of hogs."

I suppose that my doubts and irritation were apparent in the inelegantjocosity of my manner. At any rate, Stephen Strong, who was a shrewdobserver, took alarm.

"Look here, doctor," he said, "I am honest, I am; right or wrong Ibelieve in this anti-vaccination business, and we are going to run theelection on it. If you don't believe in it--and you have no particularcall to, since every man can claim his own opinion--you'd better let italone, and look on all this talk as nothing. You are our first and bestman, but we have several upon the list; I'll go on to one of them," andhe took up his hat.

I let him take it; I even let him walk towards the door; but, as heapproached it, I reflected that with that dogged burly form went all myambitions and my last chance of advancement in life. When his hand wasalready on the handle, not of premeditation, but by impulse, I said:--

"I don't know why you should talk like that, as I think that I havegiven good proof that I am no believer in vaccination."

"What's that, doctor?" he asked turning round.

"My little girl is nearly four years old and she has never beenvaccinated."

"Is it so?" he asked doubtfully.

As he spoke I heard the nurse going down the passage and with her mydaughter, whom she was taking for her morning walk. I opened the doorand called Jane in, a beautiful little being with dark eyes and goldenhair.

"Look for yourself," I said, and, taking off the child's coat, I showedhim both her arms. Then I kissed her and sent her back to the nurse.

"That's good enough, doctor, but, mind you, she mustn't be vaccinatednow."

As he spoke the words my heart sank in me, for I understood what Ihad done and the risk that I was taking. But the die was cast, or so Ithought, in my folly. It was too late to go back.

"Don't be afraid," I said, "no cow poison shall be mixed with herblood."

"Now I believe you, doctor," he answered, "for a man won't play trickswith his only child just to help himself. I'll take your answer to thecouncil, and they will send you the formal letter of invitation to standwith the conditions attached. Before you answer it the money will belodged, and you shall have my bond for it. And now I must be going,for I am wasting your time and those patients of yours will be gettingtired. If you will come to supper to-night I'll have some of the leadersto meet you and we can talk things over. Good-bye, we shall win theseat; so sure as my name is Stephen Strong we shall win on the A.V.ticket."

He went, and I saw those of my patients who had sat out the wait. Whenthey had gone, I considered the position, summing it up in my own mind.The prospect was exhilarating, and yet I was depressed, for I had boundmyself to the chariot wheels of a false doctrine. Also, by implication,I had told Strong a lie. It was true that Jane had not been vaccinated,but of this I had neglected to give him the reason. It was that I hadpostponed vaccinating her for a while owing to a certain infantiledelicacy, being better acquainted than most men with the risksconsequent on that operation, slight though it is, in certain conditionsof a child's health, and knowing that there was no danger of her takingsmallpox in a town which was free from it. I proposed, however, toperform the operation within the next few days; indeed, for this verypurpose I had already written to London to secure some glycerinated calflymph, which would now be wasted.

The local papers next morning appeared with an announcement that at theforthcoming bye-election Dunchester would be contested in the Radicalinterest by James Therne, Esq., M.D. They added that, in addition toother articles of the Radical faith, Dr. Therne professed the doctrineof anti-vaccination, of which he was so ardent an upholder that,although on several occasions he had been threatened with prosecution,he declined to allow his only child to be vaccinated.

In the same issues it was announced that the Conservative candidatewould be Sir Thomas Colford.

So the die was cast. I had crossed the Rubicon.

CHAPTER VIII - BRAVO THE A.V.'S

In another week the writ had been issued, and we were in the thick ofthe fight. What a fight it was! Memory could not record; tradition didnot even record another half as fierce in the borough of Dunchester.For the most part, that is in many of our constituencies, it is notdifficult for a candidate standing in the Radical interest, if he isable, well-backed, and not too particular as to what he promises, to winthe seat for his party. But Dunchester was something of an exception.In a sense it was corrupt, that is, it had always been represented bya rich man, who was expected to pay liberally for the honour of itsconfidence. Pay he did, indeed, in large and numberless subscriptions,in the endowment of reading-rooms, in presents of public parks, and Iknow not what besides.

At least it is a fact that almost every advantage of this nature enjoyedto-day by the inhabitants of Dunchester, has been provided for them byformer Conservative members for the borough.

Under these circumstances it is not to be wondered at that in choosinga candidate the majority of the electors of the city were apt to ask twoleading questions: first, Is he rich? and secondly, What will he do forthe town if he gets in?

Now, Sir Thomas Colford was very rich, and it was whispered that if hewere elected he would be prepared to show his gratitude in a substantialfashion. A new wing to the hospital was wanted; this it was said wouldbe erected and endowed; also forty acres of valuable land belonging tohim ran into the park, and he had been heard to say that these fortyacres were really much more important to the public than to himself, andthat he hoped that one day they would belong to it.

It is small wonder, then, that the announcement of his candidature wasreceived with passionate enthusiasm. Mine, on the contrary, evoked achorus of disapproval, that is, in the local press. I was denouncedas an adventurer, as a man who had stood a criminal trial for wickednegligence, and escaped the jail only by the skin of my teeth. I washeld up to public reprobation as a Socialist, who, having nothingmyself, wished to prey upon the goods of others, and as ananti-vaccination quack who, to gain a few votes, was ready to infest thewhole community with a loathsome disease. Of all the accusations ofmy opponents this was the only one that stung me, because it alone hadtruth in it.

Sir John Bell, my old enemy, one of the nominators of Sir ThomasColford, appeared upon the platform at his first meeting, and, speakingin the character of

an old and leading citizen of the town, and as onewho had doctored most of them, implored his audience not to trust theirpolitical fortunes to such a person as myself, whose doctrines wererepudiated by almost every member of the profession, which I disgraced.This appeal carried much weight with it.

From all these circumstances it might have been supposed that my casewas hopeless, especially as no Radical had even ventured to contest theseat in the last two elections. But, in fact, this was not so, for inDunchester there existed a large body of voters, many of them employedin shoe-making factories, who were almost socialistic in their views.These men, spending their days in some hive of machinery, and theirnights in squalid tenements built in dreary rows, which in citiessuch people are doomed to inhabit, were very bitter against the upperclasses, and indeed against all who lived in decent comfort.

This was not to be marvelled at, for what can be expected of folkwhose lot, hard as it is, has none of the mitigations that lighten thetroubles of those who live in the country, and who can at least breathethe free air and enjoy the beauties that are common to all? Here, atDunchester, their pleasures consisted for the most part in a dog fightor some such refining spectacle, varied by an occasional "boose" atthe public-house, or, in the case of those who chanced to be moreintellectually inclined, by attending lectures where Socialism and otheradvanced doctrines were preached. As was but natural, this class mightbe relied upon almost to a man to vote for the party which promised tobetter their lot, rather than for the party which could only recommendthem to be contented and to improve themselves. To secure their supportit was only necessary to be extravagant of promises and abusive ofemployers who refused to pay them impossible wages.

Next in importance to these red-hot "forwards" came the phalanx ofold-fashioned people who voted Liberal because their fathers hadvoted Liberal before them. Then there were the electors who used to beConservative but, being honestly dissatisfied with the Government onaccount of its foreign policy, or for other reasons, had made up theirminds to transfer their allegiance. Also there were the dissenters, whoset hatred of the Church above all politics, and made its disendowmentand humiliation their watchword. In Dunchester these were active andnumerous, a very tower of strength to me, for Stephen Strong was thewealthiest and most important of them.

During the first day or two of the canvass, however, a careful estimateof our electoral strength showed it to be several hundred votes short ofthat of our opponents. Therefore, if we would win, we must make convertsby appealing to the prejudices of members of the electorate who were ofConservative views; in other words, by preaching "fads."

Of these there were many, all useful to the candidate of pliant mind,such as the total drink-prohibition fad, the anti-dog-muzzling fad, andothers, each of which was worth some votes. Even the Peculiar People, asociety that makes a religion of killing helpless children by refusingthem medical aid when they are ill, were good for ten or twelve. Here,however, I drew the line, for when asking whether I would support a billrelieving them from all liability to criminal prosecution in the eventof the death of their victims, I absolutely declined to give any suchundertaking.

But although all these fancies had their followers, it was theanti-vaccination craze that really had a hold in Dunchester. The"A.V.'s," as they called themselves, were numbered by hundreds, for theNational League and other similar associations had been at work here foryears, with such success that already twenty per cent. of the childrenborn in the last decade had never been vaccinated. For a while theBoard of Guardians had been slow to move, then, on the election of a newchairman and the representations of the medical profession of the town,they instituted a series of prosecutions against parents who refused tocomply with the Vaccination Acts. Unluckily for the Conservative party,these prosecutions, which aroused the most bitter feelings, were stillgoing on when the seat fell vacant; hence from an electoral point ofview the question became one of first-class importance.

In Dunchester, as elsewhere, the great majority of the anti-vaccinatorswere already Radical, but there remained a residue, estimated at from300 to 400, who voted "blue" or Conservative. If these men could bebrought over, I should win; if they remained faithful to their colour, Imust lose. Therefore it will be seen that Stephen Strong was right whenhe said that the election would be won or lost upon anti-vaccination.

At the first public meeting of the Conservatives, after Sir Thomas'sspeech, the spokesman of the anti-vaccination party rose and asked himwhether he was in favour of the abolition of the Compulsory Vaccinationlaws. Now, at this very meeting Sir John Bell had already spokendenouncing me for my views upon this question, thereby to some extenttying the candidate's hands. So, after some pause and consultation,Sir Thomas replied that he was in favour of freeing "ConscientiousObjectors" to vaccination from all legal penalties. Like most halfmeasures, this decision of course did not gain him a single vote,whereas it certainly lost him much support.

On the same evening a similar question was put to me. My answer maybe guessed, indeed I took the opportunity to make a speech which wascheered to the echo, for, having acted the great lie of espousing theanti-vaccination cause, I felt that it was not worth while to hesitatein telling other lies in support of it. Moreover, I knew my subjectthoroughly, and understood what points to dwell

upon and what to glozeover, how to twist and turn the statistics, and how to marshal my factsin such fashion as would make it very difficult to expose their fallacy.Then, when I had done with general arguments, I went on to particularcases, describing as a doctor can do the most dreadful which had evercome under my notice, with such power and pathos that women in theaudience burst into tears.

Finally, I ended by an impassioned appeal to all present to follow myexample and refuse to allow their children to be poisoned. I called onthem as free men to rise against this monstrous Tyranny, to put a stopto this system of organised and judicial Infanticide, and to send me toParliament to raise my voice on their behalf in the cause of helplessinfants whose tender bodies now, day by day, under the command of thelaw, were made the receptacles of the most filthy diseases from whichman was doomed to suffer.

As I sat down the whole of that great audience--it numbered more than2000--rose in their places shouting "We will! we will!" after whichfollowed a scene of enthusiasm such as I had never seen before,emphasised by cries of "We are free Englishmen," "Down with thebaby-butchers," "We will put you in, sir," and so forth.

That meeting gave me my cue, and thenceforward, leaving almost everyother topic on one side, I and my workers devoted ourselves to preachingthe anti-vaccination doctrines. We flooded the constituency with tractsheaded "What Vaccination does," "The Law of Useless Infanticide," "TheVaccine Tyranny," "Is Vaccination a Fraud?" and so forth, and withhorrible pictures of calves stretched out by pulleys, gagged andblindfolded, with their under parts covered by vaccine vesicles. Alsowe had photographs of children suffering from the effects of improper orunclean vaccination, which, by means of magic lantern slides, couldbe thrown life-sized on a screen; indeed, one or two such childrenthemselves were taken round to meetings and their sores exhibited.

The effect of all this was wonderful, for I know of nothing capable ofrousing honest but ignorant people to greater rage and enthusiasm thanthis anti-vaccination cry. They believe it to be true, or, at least,seeing one or two cases in which it is true, and having never seen acase of smallpox, they suppose that the whole race is being poisonedby wicked doctors for their own gain. Hence their fierce energy andheartfelt indignation.

Well, it carried me through. The election was fought not with foilsbut with rapiers. Against me were arrayed the entire wealth, rank, andfashion of the city, reinforced by Conservative speakers famous fortheir parliamentary eloquence, who were sent down to support Sir ThomasColford. Nor was this all: when it was

recognised that the fight wouldbe a close one, an eloquent and leading member of the House was sent tointervene in person. He came and addressed a vast meeting gathered inthe biggest building of the city. Seated among a crowd of workmen ona back bench I was one of his audience. His speech was excellent, ifsomewhat too general and academic. To the "A.V." agitation, witha curious misapprehension of the state of the case, he devoted oneparagraph only. It ran something like this:--

"I am told that our opponents, putting aside the great and generalissues upon which I have had the honour to address you, attempt togain support by entering upon a crusade--to my mind a most perniciouscrusade--against the law of compulsory vaccination. I am not concernedto defend that law, because practically in the mind of all reasonablemen it stands beyond attack. It is, I am told, suggested that the Actshould be amended by freeing from the usual penalties any parentwho chooses to advance a plea of conscientious objection against thevaccination of his children. Such an argument seems to me too puerile,I had almost said too wicked, to dwell upon, for in its issue it wouldmean that at the whim of individuals innocent children might be exposedto disease, disfigurement, and death, and the whole community throughthem to a very real and imminent danger. Prophecy is dangerous, but,speaking for myself as a private member of Parliament, I can scarcelybelieve that responsible ministers of any party, moved by the pressureof an ill-informed and erroneous opinion, would ever consent under thiselastic plea of conscience to establish such a precedent of surrender.Vaccination with its proved benefits is outside the pale of party. Afterlong and careful study, science and the medical profession have givena verdict in its favour, a verdict which has now been confirmed by theexperience of generations. Here I leave the question, and, turning oncemore before I sit down to those great and general issues of which Ihave already spoken, I would again impress upon this vast audience, andthrough it upon the constituency at large," etc., etc., etc.

Within a year it was my lot to listen to an eminent leader of thatdistinguished member (with the distinguished member's tacit consent)pressing upon an astonished House of Commons the need of yielding tothe clamour of the anti-vaccinationists, and of inserting into the Bill,framed upon the report of a Royal Commission, a clause forbidding theprosecution of parents or guardians willing to assert before a bench ofmagistrates that they objected to vaccination on conscientious grounds.

The appeal was not in vain; the Bill passed in its amended form; andwithin twenty years I lived to see its fruits.

At length came the polling day. After this lapse of time I rememberlittle of its details. I, as became a Democratic candidate, walkedfrom polling-station to

polling-station, while my opponent, as becamea wealthy banker, drove about the city in a carriage and four. At eighto'clock the ballot-boxes were sealed up and conveyed to the town-hall,where the counting commenced in the presence of the Mayor, thecandidates, their agents, and the necessary officers and assistants.Box after box was opened and the papers counted out into separate heaps,those for Colford into one pile, those for Therne into another, thespoiled votes being kept by themselves.

The counting began about half-past nine, and up to a quarter to twelvenobody could form an idea as to the ultimate result, although at thattime the Conservative candidate appeared to be about five and thirtyvotes ahead. Then the last ballot-box was opened; it came from a poorquarter of the city, a ward in which I had many supporters.

Sir Thomas Colford and I, with our little knots of agents andsub-agents, placed ourselves one on each side of the table, waiting inrespectful silence while the clerk dealt out the papers, as a playerdeals out cards. It was an anxious moment, as any one who has gonethrough a closely-contested parliamentary election can testify. For tendays or more the strain had been great, but, curiously enough, nowat its climax it seemed to have lost its grip of me. I watched thedenoument of the game with keenness and interest indeed, but as thoughI were not immediately and personally concerned. I felt that I had donemy best to win, and no longer cared whether my efforts ended in successor failure. Possibly this was the result of the apathy that falls uponoverstrained nerves. Possibly I was oppressed by the fear of victoryand of that Nemesis which almost invariably dogs the steps of ouraccomplished desires, of what the French writer calls la pageeffrayante . . . des desirs accomplis. At least just then I carednothing whether I won or lost, only I reflected that in the latter eventit would be sad to have told so many falsehoods to no good purpose.

"How does it stand?" asked the head Conservative agent of the officer.

The clerk took the last numbers from the counters and added up thefigures.

"Colford, 4303; Therne, 4291, and two more bundles to count."

Another packet was counted out.

"How does it stand?" asked the agent.

"Colford, 4349; Therne, 4327, and one more bundle of fifty to count,"answered the clerk.

The agent gave a sigh of relief and smiled; I saw him press Sir Thomas'shand in congratulations, for now he was sure that victory was theirs.

"The game is up," I whispered to Strong, who, as my principal supporter,had been admitted with me to the hall.

He ground his teeth and I noticed in the gaslight that his face wasghastly pale and his lips were blue.

"You had better go out," I said, "you are overtaxing that dilated heartof yours. Go home and take a sleeping draught."

"Damn you, no," he answered fiercely in my ear, "those papers come fromthe Little Martha ward, where I thought there wasn't a wrong 'un in thecrowd. If they've sold me, I'll be even with them, as sure as my name isStrong."

"Come," I said with a laugh, "a good Radical shouldn't talk like that."For me the bitterness was over, and, knowing the worst, I could affordto laugh.

The official opened the last packet and began to count aloud.

The first vote was for "Therne," but bad, for the elector had writtenhis name upon the paper. Then in succession came nine for "Colford." Nowall interest in the result had died away, and a hum of talk arose fromthose present in the room, a whispered murmur of congratulations andcondolences. No wonder, seeing that to win I must put to my creditthirty-two of the forty remaining papers, which seemed a thingimpossible.

The counter went on counting aloud and dealing down the papers as hecounted. One, two, three, four, and straight on up to ten for Therne,when he paused to examine a paper, then "One for Colford." Then, inrapid successful, "Five, ten, fifteen for Therne."

Now the hum of conversation died away, for it was felt that this wasbecoming interesting. Of course it was practically impossible that Ishould win, for there were but fourteen papers left, and to do so I mustsecure eleven of them!

"Sixteen for Therne," went on the counter, "seventeen, eighteen,nineteen, twenty."

Now the excitement grew intense, for if the run held in two more votes Ishould tie. Every eye was fixed upon the counter's hand.

To the right and left of him on the table were two little piles ofvoting papers. The

pile to the right was the property of Colford,the pile to the left was sacred to Therne. The paper was unfolded andglanced at, then up went the hand and down floated the fateful sheet onto the left-hand pile. "Twenty-one for Therne." Again the process wasrepeated, and again the left-hand pile was increased. "Twenty-two forTherne."

"By heaven! you've tied him," gasped Stephen Strong.

There were but seven papers left, and the candidate who secured four ofthem would be the winner of the election.

"Twenty-three for Therne, twenty-four, twenty-five"--a silence in whichyou could hear the breath of other men and the beating of your ownheart.

"Twenty-six for Therne, twenty-seven, twenty-eight, twenty-nine, allfor Therne."

Then, bursting from the lips of Stephen Strong, a shrill hoarse cry,more like the cry of a beast than that of a man, and the words, "By God!we've won. The A.V.'s have done it. Bravo the A.V.'s!"

"Silence!" said the Mayor, bringing his fist down upon the table, butso far as Stephen Strong was concerned, the order was superfluous, forsuddenly his face flushed, then turned a dreadful ashen grey, and downhe sank upon the floor. As I leant over him and began to loosen hiscollar, I heard the Conservative agent say in strident tones:--

"There is some mistake, there must be some mistake. It is almostimpossible that Dr. Therne can have polled twenty-nine votes insuccession. On behalf of Sir Thomas Colford, I demand a recount."

"Certainly," answered some official, "let it be begun at once."

In that ceremony I took no part; indeed, I spent the next two hours,with the help of another doctor, trying to restore consciousness toStephen Strong in a little room that opened off the town-hall. Withinhalf an hour Mrs. Strong arrived.

"He still breathes," I said in answer to her questioning glance.

Then the poor little woman sat herself down upon the edge of a chair,clasped her hands and said, "If the Lord wills it, dear Stephen willlive; and if the Lord wills it, he will die."

This sentence she repeated at intervals until the end came. After twohours there

was a knocking at the door.

"Go away," I said, but the knocker would not go away. So I opened. Itwas my agent, who whispered in an excited voice, "The count's quitecorrect, you are in by seven."

"All right," I answered, "tell them we want some more brandy."

At that moment Stephen Strong opened his eyes, and at that moment alsothere arose a mighty burst of cheering from the crowd assembled on themarket-place without, to whom the Mayor had declared the numbers from awindow of the town-hall.

The dying man heard the cheering, and looked at me inquiringly, for hecould not speak. I tried to explain that I was elected on the recount,but was unable to make him understand. Then I hit upon an expedient. Onthe floor lay a Conservative rosette of blue ribbon. I took it up andtook also my own Radical colours from my coat. Holding one of them ineach hand before Strong's dying eyes, I lifted up the Radical orange andlet the Conservative blue fall to the floor.

He saw and understood, for a ghastly smile appeared upon his distortedface. Indeed, he did more--almost with his last breath he spoke in ahoarse, gurgling whisper, and his words were, "Bravo the A.V.'s!"

Now he shut his eyes, and I thought that the end had come, but, openingthem presently, he fixed them with great earnestness first upon myselfand then upon his wife, accompanying the glance with a slight movementof the head. I did not know what he could mean, but with his wife itwas otherwise, for she said, "Don't trouble yourself, Stephen, I quiteunderstand."

Five minutes more and it was over; Stephen Strong's dilated heart hadcontracted for the last time.

"I see it has pleased the Lord that dear Stephen should die," saidMrs. Strong in her quiet voice. "When you have spoken to the people outthere, doctor, will you take me home? I am very sorry to trouble, but Isaw that after he was gone Stephen wished me to turn to you."

CHAPTER IX - FORTUNE

My return to Parliament meant not only the loss of a seat to theGovernment, a matter of no great moment in view of their enormousmajority, but, probably, through their own fears, was construed bythem into a solemn warning not to be disregarded. Certain papers andopposition speakers talked freely of the writing on the wall, and nonesaw that writing in larger, or more fiery letters, than the members ofHer Majesty's Government. I believe that to them it took the form not ofHebraic characters, but of two large Roman capitals, the letters A andV.

Hitherto the anti-vaccinators had been known as troublesome people whohad to be reckoned with, but that they should prove strong enough towrest what had been considered one of the safest seats in the kingdomout of the hands of the Unionists came upon the party as a revelation ofthe most unpleasant order. For Stephen Strong's dying cry, of which thetruth was universally acknowledged, "The A.V.'s have done it. Bravo theA.V.'s!" had echoed through the length and breadth of the land.

When a Government thinks that agitators are weak, naturally and properlyit treats them with contempt, but, when it finds that they are strongenough to win elections, then their arguments become more worthy ofconsideration. And so the great heart of the parliamentary Pharaoh beganto soften towards the anti-vaccinators, and of this softening the firstsigns were discernible within three or four days of my taking my seat asmember for Dunchester.

I think I may say without vanity, and the statement will not becontradicted by those who sat with me, that I made a good impressionupon the House from the first day I entered its doors. Doubtless itsmembers had expected to find in me a rabid person liable to burst into afoam of violence at the word "vaccination," and were agreeably surprisedto find that I was much as other men are, only rather quieter than mostof them. I did not attempt to force myself upon the notice of the House,but once or twice during the dinner hour I made a few remarks uponsubjects connected with public health which were received withoutimpatience, and, in the interval, I tried to master its forms, and toget in touch with its temper.

In those far-away and long-forgotten days a Royal Commission had beensitting for some years to consider the whole question of compulsoryvaccination; it was the same before which I had been called to giveevidence. At length this commission delivered itself of its finalreport, a very sensible one in an enormous blue-book, which if adoptedwould practically have continued the existing

Vaccination Acts withamendments. These amendments provided that in future the publicvaccinator should visit the home of the child, and, if the conditionsof that home and of the child itself were healthy, offer to vaccinate itwith glycerinated calf lymph. Also they extended the time during whichthe parents and guardians were exempt from prosecution, and in variousways mitigated the rigour of the prevailing regulations. The subjectmatter of this report was embodied in a short Bill to amend the law andlaid before Parliament, which Bill went to a standing committee, andultimately came up for the consideration of the House.

Then followed the great debate and the great surprise. A member movedthat it should be read that day six months, and others followed on thesame side. The President of the Local Government Board of the day, Iremember, made a strong speech in favour of the Bill, after which othermembers spoke, including myself. But although about ninety out of everyhundred of the individuals who then constituted the House of Commonswere strong believers in the merits of vaccination, hardly one of themrose in his place to support the Bill. The lesson of Dunchester amongstothers was before their eyes, and, whatever their private faith mightbe, they were convinced that if they did so it would lose them votes atthe next election.

At this ominous silence the Government grew frightened, and towards theend of the debate, to the astonishment of the House and of the country,the First Lord of the Treasury rose and offered to insert a clause byvirtue of which any parent or other person who under the Bill wouldbe liable to penalties for the non-vaccination of a child, should beentirely freed from such penalties if within four months of its birthhe satisfied two justices of the peace that he conscientiously believedthat the operation would be prejudicial to that child's health. The Billpassed with the clause, which a few days later was rejected by theHouse of Lords. Government pressure was put upon the Lords, who thereonreversed their decision, and the Bill became an Act of Parliament.

Thus the whole policy of compulsory vaccination, which for many yearshad been in force in England, was destroyed at a single blow by aGovernment with a great majority, and a House of Commons composed ofmembers who, for the most part, were absolute believers in its virtues.Never before did agitators meet with so vast and complete a success, andseldom perhaps did a Government undertake so great a responsibility forthe sake of peace, and in order to shelve a troublesome and dangerousdispute. It was a very triumph of opportunism, for the Government, aidedand abetted by their supporters, threw over their beliefs to appease asmall but persistent section of the electors. Convinced that compulsoryvaccination was for the benefit of the community, they yet stretchedthe theory of the authority of the parent over the child to suchan

unprecedented extent that, in order to satisfy his individualprejudices, that parent was henceforth to be allowed to expose hishelpless infant to the risk of terrible disease and of death.

It is not for me to judge their motives, which may have been pure andexcellent; my own are enough for me to deal with. But the fact remainsthat, having power in their hands to impose the conclusions of acommittee of experts on the nation, and being as a body satisfied asto the soundness of those conclusions, they still took the risk ofdisregarding them. Now the result of their action is evident; now wehave reaped the seed which they sowed, nor did they win a vote or a"thank you" by their amiable and philosophic concessions, which earnedthem no gratitude but indignation mingled with something not unlikecontempt.

So much for the anti-vaccination agitation, on the crest of whose wave Iwas carried to fortune and success. Thenceforward for many long years mycareer was one of strange and startling prosperity. Dunchester becamemy pocket borough, so much so, indeed, that at the three elections whichoccurred before the last of which I have to tell no one even ventured tocontest the seat against me. Although I was never recognised as a leaderof men, chiefly, I believe, because of a secret distrust which wasentertained as to my character and the sincerity of my motives, sessionby session my parliamentary repute increased, till, in the last RadicalGovernment, I was offered, and for two years filled, the post ofUnder-Secretary to the Home Office. Indeed, when at last we went tothe country over the question of the China War, I had in my pocket adiscreetly worded undertaking that, if our party succeeded at the polls,my claims to the Home Secretaryship should be "carefully considered."But it was not fated that I should ever again cross the threshold of St.Stephen's.

So much for my public career, which I have only touched on inillustration of my private and moral history.

The reader may wonder how it came about that I was able to supportmyself and keep up my position during all this space of time, seeingthat my attendance in Parliament made it impossible for me to continuein practise as a doctor. It happened thus.

When my old and true friend, Stephen Strong, died on the night of myelection, it was found that he was even richer than had been supposed,indeed his personalty was sworn at 191,000 pounds, besides which heleft real estate in shops, houses and land to the value of about 23,000pounds. Almost all of this was devised to his widow absolutely, so thatshe could dispose of it in whatever fashion pleased her. Indeed, therewas but one other bequest, that of the balance of the 10,000 poundswhich the testator had deposited in the hands of a trustee for mybenefit.

This was now left to me absolutely. I learned the fact fromMrs. Strong herself as we returned from the funeral.

"Dear Stephen has left you nearly 9000 pounds, doctor," she said shakingher head.

Gathering from her manner and this shake of her head that the legacywas not pleasing to her, I hastened to explain that doubtless it wasto carry into effect a business arrangement we had come to before Iconsented to stand for Parliament.

"Ah, indeed," she said, "that makes it worse, for it is only the paymentof a debt, not a gift."

Not knowing what she could mean, I said nothing.

"Doubtless, doctor, if dear Stephen had been granted time he would havetreated you more liberally, seeing how much he thought of you, and thatyou had given up your profession entirely to please him and serve theparty. That is what he meant when he looked at me before he died, Iguessed it from the first, and now I am sure of it. Well, doctor, whileI have anything you shall never want. Of course, a member of Parliamentis a great person, expected to live in a style which would take moremoney than I have, but I think that if I put my own expenses at 500pounds a year, which is as much as I shall want, and allow another 1000pounds for subscriptions to the anti-vaccination societies, the societyfor preventing the muzzling of dogs, and the society for the discoveryof the lost Tribes of Israel, I shall be able to help you to the extentof 1200 pounds a year, if," she added apologetically, "you think youcould possibly get along on that."

"But, Mrs. Strong," I said, "I have no claim at all upon you."

"Please do not talk nonsense, doctor. Dear Stephen wished me to providefor you, and I am only carrying out his wishes with his own money whichGod gave him perhaps for this very purpose, that it should be used tohelp a clever man to break down the tyranny of wicked governments andfalse prophets."

So I took the money, which was paid with the utmost regularity onJanuary the first and June the first in each year. On this income Ilived in comfort, keeping up my house in Dunchester for the benefit ofmy little daughter and her attendants, and hiring for my own use a flatquite close to the House of Commons.

As the years went by, however, a great anxiety took possession of me,for by slow degrees Mrs. Strong grew as feeble in mind as alreadyshe was in body, till at length, she could only recognise people atintervals, and became quite

incompetent to transact business. For awhile her bankers went on paying the allowance under her written andunrevoked order, but when they understood her true condition, theyrefused to continue the payment.

Now my position was very serious. I had little or nothing put by, and,having ceased to practise for about seventeen years, I could not hopeto earn an income from my profession. Nor could I remain a member ofthe House, at least not for long. Still, by dint of borrowing and themortgage of some property which I had acquired, I kept my head abovewater for about eighteen months. Very soon, however, my financialdistress became known, with the result that I was no longer socordially received as I had been either in Dunchester or in London. Theimpecunious cannot expect to remain popular.

At last things came to a climax, and I was driven to the step ofresigning my seat. I was in London at the time, and thence I wrote theletter to the chairman of the Radical committee in Dunchester givingill-health as the cause of my retirement. When at length it was finishedto my satisfaction, I went out and posted it, and then walked alongthe embankment as far as Cleopatra's Needle and back again. It wasa melancholy walk, taken, I remember, upon a melancholy Novemberafternoon, on which the dank mist from the river strove for mastery withthe gloomy shadows of advancing night. Not since that other evening,many many years ago, when, after my trial, I found myself face to facewith ruin or death and was saved by Stephen Strong had my fortunes beenat so low an ebb. Now, indeed, they appeared absolutely hopeless, for Iwas no longer young and fit to begin the world afresh; also, theother party being in power, I could not hope to obtain any salariedappointment upon which to support myself and my daughter. If Mrs. Stronghad kept her reason all would have been well, but she was insane, and Ihad no one to whom I could turn, for I was a man of many acquaintancesbut few friends.

Wearily I trudged back to my rooms to wait there until it was time todress, for I had a dinner engagement at the Reform Club. On the table inthe little hall lay a telegram, which I opened listlessly. It was from awell-known firm of solicitors in Dunchester, and ran:--

"Our client, Mrs. Strong, died suddenly at three o'clock. Important thatwe should see you. Will you be in Dunchester to-morrow? If not, pleasesay where and at what hour we can wait upon you in town."

"Wait upon you in town," I said to myself as I laid down the telegram. Agreat firm of solicitors would not wish to wait upon me unless they hadsomething to tell me to my advantage and their own. Mrs. Strong musthave left me some money. Possibly even I was her heir. More than oncebefore in life my luck had turned in

this sudden way, why should it nothappen again? But she was insane and could not appoint an heir! Why hadnot those fools of lawyers told me the facts instead of leaving me tothe torment of this suspense?

I glanced at the clock, then taking a telegraph form I wrote: "Shall beat Dunchester Station 8:30. Meet me there or later at the club." Takinga cab I drove to St. Pancras, just in time to catch the train. In mypocket--so closely was I pressed for money, for my account at the bankwas actually overdrawn--I had barely enough to pay for a third-classticket to Dunchester. This mattered little, however, for I alwaystravelled third-class, not because I liked it but because it lookeddemocratic and the right sort of thing for a Radical M.P. to do.

The train was a fast one, but that journey seemed absolutely endless.Now at length we had slowed down at the Dunchester signal-box, and nowwe were running into the town. If my friend the lawyer had anythingreally striking to tell me he would send to meet me at the station, and,if it was something remarkable, he would probably attend there himself.Therefore, if I saw neither the managing clerk nor the junior partner,nor the Head of the Firm, I might be certain that the news was trivial,probably--dreadful thought which had not occurred to me before--thatI was appointed executor under the will with a legacy of a hundredguineas.

The train rolled into the station. As it began to glide past thepavement of wet asphalt I closed my eyes to postpone the bitterness ofdisappointment, if only for a few seconds. Perforce I opened them againas the train was stopping, and there, the very first thing they fellupon, looking portly and imposing in a fur coat, was the rubicund-facedHead of the Firm himself. "It is good," I thought, and supportedmyself for a moment by the hat-rack, for the revulsion of feelingproduced a sudden faintness. He saw me, and sprang forward with abeaming yet respectful countenance. "It is very good," I thought.

"My dear sir," he began obsequiously, "I do trust that my telegram hasnot incommoded you, but my news was such that I felt it necessary tomeet you at the earliest possible moment, and therefore wired to you atevery probable address."

I gave the porter who took my bag a shilling. Practically it wasmy last, but that lawyer's face and manner seemed to justify theexpenditure which--so oddly are our minds constituted--I rememberreflecting I might regret if I had drawn a false inference. The mantouched his hat profusely, and, I hope, made up his mind to vote for menext time. Then I turned to the Head of the Firm and said:--

"Pray, don't apologise; but, by the way, beyond that of the death of mypoor friend, what is the news?"

"Oh, perhaps you know it," he answered, taken aback at my manner,"though she always insisted upon its being kept a dead secret, so thatone day you might have a pleasant surprise."

"I know nothing," I answered.

"Then I am glad to be the bearer of such good intelligence to afortunate and distinguished man," he said with a bow. "I have the honourto inform you in my capacity of executor to the will of the late Mrs.Martha Strong that, with the exception of a few legacies, you are lefther sole heir."

Now I wished that the hat-rack was still at hand, but, as it was not, Ipretended to stumble, and leant for a moment against the porter who hadreceived my last shilling.

"Indeed," I said recovering myself, "and can you tell me the amount ofthe property?"

"Not exactly," he answered, "but she has led a very saving life, andmoney grows, you know, money grows. I should say it must be betweenthree and four hundred thousand, nearer the latter than the former,perhaps."

"Really," I replied, "that is more than I expected; it is a littleastonishing to be lifted in a moment from the position of one with amere competence into that of a rich man. But our poor friend was--well,weak-minded, so how could she be competent to make a binding will?"

"My dear sir, her will was made within a month of her husband's death,when she was as sane as you are, as I have plenty of letters to show.Only, as I have said, she kept the contents a dead secret, in order thatone day they might be a pleasant surprise to you."

"Well," I answered, "all things considered, they have been a pleasantsurprise; I may say a very pleasant surprise. And now let us go andhave some dinner at the club. I feel tired and thirsty."

Next morning the letter that I had posted from London to the chairman ofmy committee was, at my request, returned to me unopened.

CHAPTER X - JANE MEETS DR. MERCHISON

Nobody disputed my inheritance, for, so far as I could learn, Mrs.Strong had no relatives. Nor indeed could it have been disputed, for Ihad never so much as hypnotised the deceased. When it was known howrich I had become I grew even more popular in Dunchester than I had beenbefore, also my importance increased at headquarters to such an extentthat on a change of Government I became, as I have said, Under-Secretaryto the Home Office. Although I was a useful man hitherto I had alwaysbeen refused any sort of office, because of the extreme views which Iprofessed--on platforms in the constituencies--or so those inauthority alleged. Now, however, these views were put down toamiable eccentricity; moreover, I was careful not to obtrude them.Responsibility sobers, and as we age and succeed we become moremoderate, for most of us have a method in our madness.

In brief, I determined to give up political knight-errantry and to stickto sober business. Very carefully and in the most conservative spirit Itook stock of the situation. I was still a couple of years on the rightside of fifty, young looking for my age (an advantage), a desirableparti (a great advantage, although I had no intention of re-marrying),and in full health and vigour. Further, I possessed a large fortune allin cash or in liquid assets, and I resolved that it should not diminish.I had experienced enough of ups and downs; I was sick of vicissitudes,of fears and uncertainties for the future. I said to my soul: "Thou hastenough laid up for many days; eat, drink and be merry," and I proceededto invest my modest competence in such a fashion that it brought in asteady four per cent. No South African mines or other soul-agonisingspeculations for me; sweet security was what I craved, and I got it. Icould live with great comfort, even with modest splendour, upon abouthalf my income, and the rest of it I purposed to lay out for my futurebenefit. I had observed that brewers, merchants and other magnates withcash to spare are in due course elevated to the peerage. Now I wished tobe elevated to the peerage, and to spend an honoured and honourableold age as Lord Dunchester. So when there was any shortage of the partyfunds, and such a shortage soon occurred on the occasion of an election,I posed as the friend round the corner.

Moreover, I had another aim. My daughter Jane had now grown into alovely, captivating and high-spirited young woman. To my fancy, indeed,I never saw her equal in appearance, for the large dark eyes shining ina fair and spirituelle face, encircled by masses of rippling chestnuthair, gave a bizarre and unusual distinction to her beauty, whichwas enhanced by a tall and graceful figure. She was witty also andself-willed, qualities which she inherited from her American

mother,moreover she adored me and believed in me. I, who since my wife's deathhad loved nothing else, loved this pure and noble-minded girl as onlya father can love, for my adoration had nothing selfish in it, whereasthat of the truest lover, although he may not know it, is in itsbeginnings always selfish. He has something to gain, he seeks his ownhappiness, the father seeks only the happiness of his child.

On the whole, I think that the worship of this daughter of mine isa redeeming point in my character, for which otherwise, sitting injudgment on it as I do to-day, I have no respect. Jane understood thatworship, and was grateful to me for it. Her fine unsullied instincttaught her that whatever else about me might be unsound or tarnished,this at least rang true and was beyond suspicion. She may have seen myopen faults and divined my secret weaknesses, but for the sake ofthe love I bore her she overlooked them all, indeed she refused toacknowledge them, to the extent that my worst political extravagancesbecame to her articles of faith. What I upheld was right; what Idenounced was wrong; on other points her mind was open and intelligent,but on these it was a shut and bolted door. "My father says so," was herlast argument.

My position being such that I could ensure her a splendid future, I wasnaturally anxious that she should make a brilliant marriage, since withmonstrous injustice destiny has decreed that a woman's road tosuccess must run past the altar. But as yet I could find no man whomI considered suitable or worthy. One or two I knew, but they were notpeers, and I wished her to marry a peer or a rising politician who wouldearn or inherit a peerage.

And so, good easy man, I looked around me, and said that full surelymy greatness was a-ripening. Who thinks of winter and its frosts in theglow of such a summer as I enjoyed?

For a while everything went well. I took a house in Green Street, andentertained there during the sitting of Parliament. The beauty of thehostess, my daughter Jane, together with my own position and wealth, ofwhich she was the heiress, were sufficient to find us friends, or at anyrate associates, among the noblest and most distinguished in the land,and for several seasons my dinner parties were some of the most talkedabout in London. To be asked to one of them was considered a compliment,even by men who are asked almost everywhere.

With such advantages of person, intelligence and surroundings at hercommand, Jane did not lack for opportunities of settling herself inlife. To my knowledge she had three offers in one season, the last ofthem from perhaps the best and most satisfactory parti in England. Butto my great and ever-increasing dismay, one after another she refusedthem all. The first two disappointments I bore, but on

the thirdoccasion I remonstrated. She listened quite quietly, then said:

"I am very sorry to vex you, father dear, but to marry a man whom I donot care about is just the one thing I can't do, even for your sake."

"But surely, Jane," I urged, "a father should have some voice in such amatter."

"I think he has a right to say whom his daughter shall not marry,perhaps, but not whom she shall marry."

"Then, at least," I said, catching at this straw, "will you promise thatyou won't become engaged to any one without my consent?"

Jane hesitated a little, and then answered: "What is the use of talkingof such a thing, father, as I have never seen anybody to whom I wish tobecome engaged? But, if you like, I will promise you that if I shouldchance to see any one and you don't approve of him, I will not becomeengaged to him for three years, by the end of which time he wouldprobably cease to wish to become engaged to me. But," she added with alaugh, "I am almost certain he wouldn't be a duke or a lord, or anythingof that sort, for, provided a man is a gentleman, I don't care twopenceabout his having a title."

"Jane, don't talk so foolishly," I answered.

"Well, father," she said astonished, "if those are my opinions atleast I got them from you, for I was always brought up upon strictlydemocratic principles. How often have I heard you declare in yourlectures down at Dunchester that men of our race are all equal--exceptthe working-man, who is better than the others--and that but for socialprejudice the 'son of toil' is worthy of the hand of any titled lady inthe kingdom?"

"I haven't delivered that lecture for years," I answered angrily.

"No, father, not since--let me see, not since old Mrs. Strong left youall her money, and you were made an Under-Secretary of State, and lordsand ladies began to call on us. Now, I shouldn't have said that, becauseit makes you angry, but it is true, though, isn't it?" and she was gone.

That August when the House rose we went down to a place that I owned onthe outskirts of Dunchester. It was a charming old house, situated inthe midst of a considerable estate that is famous for its shooting. Thisproperty had come to me

as part of Mrs. Strong's bequest, or, rather,she held a heavy mortgage on it, and when it was put up for sale Ibought it in. As Jane had taken a fancy to the house, which was largeand roomy, with beautiful gardens, I let my old home in the city, andwhen we were not in town we came to live at Ashfields.

On the borders of the Ashfields estate--indeed, part of the land uponwhich it was built belongs to it--lies a poor suburb of Dunchesteroccupied by workmen and their families. In these people Jane took greatinterest; indeed, she plagued me till at very large expense I built anumber of model cottages for them, with electricity, gas and waterlaid on, and bicycle-houses attached. In fact, this proved a futileproceeding, for the only result was that the former occupants of thedwellings were squeezed out, while persons of a better class, such asclerks, took possession of the model tenements at a totally inadequaterent.

It was in visiting some of the tenants of these cottages that in an evilhour Jane first met Dr. Merchison, a young man of about thirty, who heldsome parish appointment which placed the sick of this district underhis charge. Ernest Merchison was a raw-boned, muscular and ratherformidable-looking person, of Scotch descent, with strongly-markedfeatures, deep-set eyes, and very long arms. A man of few words, when hedid speak his language was direct to the verge of brusqueness, but hisrecord as a medical man was good and even distinguished, and already hehad won the reputation of being the best surgeon in Dunchester. Thiswas the individual who was selected by my daughter Jane to receivethe affections which she had refused to some of the most polished andadmired men in England, and, as I believe, largely for the reason that,instead of bowing and sighing about after her, he treated her with arudeness which was almost brutal.

In one of these new model houses lived some people of the name of Smith.Mr. Smith was a compositor, and Mrs. Smith, nee Samuels, was noneother than that very little girl whom, together with her brother, whodied, I had once treated for erysipelas resulting from vaccination. Ina way I felt grateful to her, for that case was the beginning of my realsuccess in life, and for this reason, out of several applicants, thenew model house was let to her husband as soon as it was ready foroccupation.

Could I have foreseen the results which were to flow from an act ofkindness, and that as this family had indirectly been the cause of mytriumph so they were in turn to be the cause of my ruin, I would havedestroyed the whole street with dynamite before I allowed them to setfoot in it. However, they came, bringing with them two children, alittle girl of four, to whom Jane took a great fancy, and a baby ofeighteen months.

In due course these children caught the whooping-cough, and Jane visitedthem,

taking with her some delicacies as a present. While she was thereDr. Merchison arrived in his capacity of parish doctor, and, beyond acurt bow taking no notice of Jane, began his examination, for this washis first visit to the family. Presently his eye fell upon a box ofsweets.

"What's that?" he asked sharply.

"It's a present that Miss Therne here has brought for Tottie," answeredthe mother.

"Then Tottie mustn't eat them till she is well. Sugar is bad forwhooping-cough, though, of course, a young lady couldn't be expected toknow that," he added in a voice of gruff apology, then went on quickly,glancing at the little girl's arm, "No marks, I see. ConscientiousObjector? Or only lazy?"

Then Mrs. Smith fired up and poured out her own sad history and that ofher poor little brother who died, baring her scarred arm in proof of it.

"And so," she finished, "though I do not remember much about it myself,I do remember my mother's dying words, which were 'to mind what thedoctor had told her, and never to have any child of mine vaccinated, no,not if they crawled on their knees to ask it of me.'"

"The doctor!" said Merchison with scorn, "you mean the idiot, my goodwoman, or more likely the political agitator who would sell his soul fora billet."

Then Jane rose in wrath.

"I beg your pardon for interrupting you, sir," she said, "but thegentleman you speak of as an idiot or a political agitator is Dr.Therne, my father, the member of Parliament for this city."

Dr. Merchison stared at her for a long while, and indeed when she wasangry Jane was beautiful enough to make any one stare, then he saidsimply, "Oh, indeed. I don't meddle with politics, so I didn't know."

This was too much for Jane, who, afraid to trust herself to furtherspeech, walked straight out of the cottage. She had passed down themodel garden and arrived at the model gate when she heard a quickpowerful step behind her, and turned round to find herself face to facewith Dr. Merchison.

"I have followed you to apologise, Miss Therne," he said; "of course Ihad no idea who you were and did not wish to hurt your feelings, but Ihappen to have strong

feelings about vaccination and spoke more roughlythan I ought to have done."

"Other people, sir, may also have strong opinions about vaccination,"answered Jane.

"I know," he said, "and I know, too, what the end of it all will be,as you will also, Miss Therne, if you live long enough. It is uselessarguing, the lists are closed and we must wait until the thing is put tothe proof of battle. When it is, one thing is sure, there will beplenty of dead," he added with a grim smile. Then taking off his hat andmuttering, "Again I apologise," he returned into the cottage.

It seems that for a while Jane was very angry. Then she rememberedthat, after all, Dr. Merchison had apologised, and that he had made hisoffensive remarks in the ignorance and prejudice which afflicted theentire medical profession and were more worthy of pity than of anger.Further, she remembered that in her indignation she had forgotten toacknowledge or accept his apology, and, lastly, she asked him to agarden-party.

It is scarcely necessary for me to dwell upon the subsequentdevelopments of this unhappy business--if I am right in calling itunhappy. The piteous little drama is played, both the actors are dead,and the issue of the piece is unknown and, for the present, unknowable.Bitterly opposed as I was to the suit of Merchison, justice compels meto say that, under the cloak of a rough unpromising manner, he hid ajust and generous heart. Had that man lived he might have become great,although he would never have become popular. As least something in hisnature attracted my daughter Jane, for she, who up to that time had notbeen moved by any man, became deeply attached to him.

In the end he proposed to her, how, when or where I cannot say, for Inever inquired. One morning, I remember it was that of Christmas day,they came into my library, the pair of them, and informed me how mattersstood. Merchison went straight to the point and put the case beforeme very briefly, but in a manly and outspoken fashion. He said thathe quite understood the difficulties of his position, inasmuch as hebelieved that Jane was, or would be, very rich, whereas he had nothingbeyond his profession, in which, however, he was doing well. He ended byasking my consent to the engagement subject to any reasonable conditionsthat I might choose to lay down.

To me the shock was great, for, occupied as I was with my own affairsand ambitions, I had been blind to what was passing before my face.I had hoped to see my daughter a peeress, and now I found her theaffianced bride of a parish sawbones. The very foundation of my house ofhopes was sapped; at a blow all my schemes for the swift aggrandisementof my family were laid low. It was too much

for me. Instead of acceptingthe inevitable, and being glad to accept it because my child's happinesswas involved, I rebelled and kicked against the pricks.

By nature I am not a violent man, but on that occasion I lost mytemper and became violent. I refused my consent; I threatened to cutmy daughter off with nothing, but at this argument she and her loversmiled. Then I took another ground, for, remembering her promise thatshe would consent to be separated for three years from any suitor ofwhom I did not approve, I claimed its fulfilment.

Somewhat to my surprise, after a hurried private consultation, Jane andher lover accepted these conditions, telling me frankly that theywould wait for three years, but that after these had gone by they wouldconsider themselves at liberty to marry, with my consent if possible,but, if necessary, without it. Then in my presence they kissed andparted, nor until the last did either of them attempt to break theletter of their bond. Once indeed they met before that dreadful hour,but then it was the workings of fate that brought them together and nottheir own design.

CHAPTER XI - THE COMING OF THE RED-HEADED MAN

Half of the three years of probation had gone by and once more we foundourselves at Dunchester in August. Under circumstances still too recentto need explanation, the Government of which I was a member had decidedto appeal to the country, the General Election being fixed for theend of September, after the termination of harvest. Dunchester wasconsidered to be a safe Radical seat, and, as a matter of parliamentarytactics, the poll for this city, together with that of eight or tenother boroughs, was fixed for the earliest possible day, in the hopethat the results might encourage more doubtful places to give theirsupport. Constituencies are very like sheep, and if the leaders jumpthrough a certain gap in the political hedge the flock, or a largeproportion of it, will generally follow. All of us like to be on thewinning side.

Few people who are old enough to remember it will ever forget the Augustof two years ago, if only because of the phenomenal heat. Up to thatmonth the year had been very cold, so cold that even during July therewere some evenings when a fire was welcome, while on several days I sawpeople driving about the roads wrapped up in heavy ulsters. But with thefirst day of August all this changed, and suddenly the climate becametorrid, the nights especially being extraordinarily hot. From everyquarter of the country came complaints of the great heat, while eachissue of the newspapers contained lists of those who had fallen victimsto it.

One evening, feeling oppressed in the tree-enclosed park of Ashfields,I strolled out of it into the suburb of which I have spoken. Almostopposite the private garden of the park stands a board school, and infront of this board school I had laid out an acre of land presented bymyself, as a playground and open space for the use of the public. In thecentre of this garden was a fountain that fell into a marble basin, andaround the fountain, but at some distance from it, stood iron seats.To these I made my way and sat down on one of them, which was empty,in order to enjoy the cool sound of the splashing water, about which alarge number of children were playing.

Presently, as I sat thus, I lifted my eyes and saw the figure of a manapproaching towards the other side of the fountain. He was quite fiftyyards away from me, so that his features were invisible, but there wassomething about his general aspect which attracted my attention at once.To begin with, he looked small and lonely, all by himself out there onthe wide expanse of gravel; moreover, the last rays of the settingsun, striking full upon him, gave him a fiery and unnatural appearanceagainst the dense background of shadows beyond. It is a strange anddreadful coincidence, but by some extraordinary action of the mind, sosubtle

that I cannot trace the link, the apparition of this man out ofthe gloom into the fierce light of the sunset reminded me of a picturethat I had once seen representing the approach to the Norwegian harbourof the ship which brought the plague to the shores of Scandanavia. Inthe picture that ship also was clothed with the fires of sunset, whilebehind it lay the blackness of approaching night. Like this wandererthat ship also came forward, slowly indeed, but without pause, as thoughalive with a purpose of its own, and I remember that awaiting it uponthe quay were a number of merry children.

Shaking myself free from this ridiculous but unpleasant thought, Icontinued to observe the man idly. Clearly he was one of the great armyof tramps, for his coat was wide and ragged and his hat half innocent ofrim, although there was something about his figure which suggested tome that he had seen better days. I could even imagine that under certaincircumstances I might have come to look very much like this poor man,now doubtless turned into a mere animal by drink. He drew on with a longslow step, his head stretched forward, his eyes fixed upon the water,as he walked now and again lifting a long thin hand and scrapingimpatiently at his face and head.

"That poor fellow has got a touch of prickly heat and is thirsty,"I thought, nor was I mistaken, for, on arriving at the edge of thefountain, the tramp knelt down and drank copiously, making a moaningsound as he gulped the water, which was very peculiar and unpleasant tohear. When he had satisfied his thirst, he sat himself upon the marbleedge of the basin and suddenly plunged his legs, boots and all, into thewater. Its touch seemed to please him, for with a single swift movementhe slipped in altogether, sitting himself down on the bottom of thebasin in such fashion that only his face and fiery red beard, from whichthe hat had fallen, remained above the surface, whereon they seemed tofloat like some monstrous and unnatural growth.

This unusual proceeding on the part of the tramping stranger at onceexcited the most intense interest in the mind of every child on theplayground, with the result that in another minute forty or fiftyof them had gathered round the fountain, laughing and jeering at itsoccupant. Again the sight brought to my mind a strained and disagreeablesimile, for I bethought me of the dreadful tale of Elisha and of thefate which overtook the children who mocked him. Decidedly the heat hadupset my nerves that night, nor were they soothed when suddenly from thered head floating upon the water came a flute-like and educated voice,saying--

"Cease deriding the unfortunate, children, or I will come out of thismarble bath and tickle you."

Thereat they laughed all the more, and began to pelt the bather withlittle stones

and bits of stick.

At first I thought of interfering, but as it occurred to me that the manwould probably be violent or abusive if I spoke to him, and as, aboveall things, I disliked scenes, I made up my mind to fetch a policeman,whom I knew I should find round the corner about a hundred yards away. Iwalked to the corner, but did not find the policeman, whereon I startedacross the square to look for him at another point. My road led mepast the fountain, and, as I approached it, I saw that the water-lovingwanderer had been as good as his word. He had emerged from the fountain,and, rushing to and fro raining moisture from his wide coat, despitetheir shrieks half of fear and half of laughter, he grabbed child afterchild and, drawing it to him, tickled and kissed it, laughing dementedlyall the while, in a fashion which showed me that he was suffering fromsome form of mania.

As soon as he saw me the man dropped the last child he had caught--itwas little Tottie Smith--and began to stride away towards the cityat the same slow, regular, purposeful gait with which I had seen himapproach the fountain. As he passed he turned and made a grimace atme, and then I saw his dreadful face. No wonder it had looked red ata distance, for the erythema almost covered it, except where, on theforehead and cheeks, appeared purple spots and patches.

Of what did it remind me?

Great Heaven! I remembered. It reminded me of the face of that girl Ihad seen lying in the plaza of San Jose, in Mexico, over whom the oldwoman was pouring water from the fountain, much such a fountain asthat before me, for half unconsciously, when planning this place, I hadreproduced its beautiful design. It all came back to me with a shock,the horrible scene of which I had scarcely thought for years, so vividlyindeed that I seemed to hear the old hag's voice crying in crackedaccents, "Si, senor, viruela, viruela!"

I ought to have sent to warn the police and the health officers of thecity, for I was sure that the man was suffering from what is commonlycalled confluent smallpox. But I did not. From the beginning there hasbeen something about this terrible disease which physically and morallyhas exercised so great an influence over my destiny, that seemed toparalyse my mental powers. In my day I was a doctor fearless of anyother contagion; typhus, scarletina, diphtheria, yellow fever, noneof them had terrors for me. And yet I was afraid to attend a case ofsmallpox. From the same cause, in my public speeches I made light of it,talking of it with contempt as a sickness of small account, much as ahousemaid talks in the servants' hall of the ghost which is supposed tohaunt the back stairs.

And now, coming as it were from that merry and populous chamber oflife and

health, once again I met the Spectre I derided, a red-headed,red-visaged Thing that chose me out to stop and grin at. Somehow I wasnot minded to return and announce the fact.

"Why," they would say, "you were the one who did not believe inghosts. It was you who preached of vile superstitions, and yet merelyat the sight of a shadow you rush in with trembling hands and bristlinghair to bid us lay it with bell, book, and candle. Where is your faith,O prophet?"

It was nonsense; the heat and all my incessant political work had triedme and I was mistaken. That tramp was a drunken, or perhaps a crazycreature, afflicted with some skin disease such as are common among hisclass. Why did I allow the incident to trouble me?

I went home and washed out my mouth, and sprinkled my clothes with astrong solution of permanganate of potash, for, although my own follywas evident, it is always as well to be careful, especially in hotweather. Still I could not help wondering what might happen if byany chance smallpox were to get a hold of a population like that ofDunchester, or indeed of a hundred other places in England.

Since the passing of the famous Conscience Clause many years before, aswas anticipated would be the case, and as the anti-vaccinators intendedshould be the case, vaccination had become a dead letter amongst atleast seventy-five per cent. of the people.[*] Our various societiesand agents were not content to let things take their course and to allowparents to vaccinate their children, or to leave them unvaccinatedas they might think fit. On the contrary, we had instituted ahouse-to-house canvass, and our visitors took with them forms ofconscientious objection, to be filled in by parents or guardians, andlegally witnessed.

[*] Since the above was written the author has read in the press that in Yorkshire a single bench of magistrates out of the hundreds in England has already granted orders on the ground of "conscientious objection," under which some 2000 children are exempted from the scope of the Vaccination Acts. So far as he has seen this statement has not been contradicted. At Ipswich also about 700 applications, affecting many children, have been filed. To deal with these the Bench is holding special sessions, sitting at seven o'clock in the evening.

At first the magistrates refused to accept these forms, but aftera while, when they found how impossible it was to dive into a man'sconscience and to decide what was or what was not "conscientiousobjection," they received them as sufficient evidence, provided onlythat they were sworn before some one entitled to

administer oaths. Manyof the objectors did not even take the trouble to do as much as this,for within five years of the passing of the Act, in practice thevaccination laws ceased to exist. The burden of prosecution rested withBoards of Guardians, popularly elected bodies, and what board was likelyto go to the trouble of working up a case and to the expense of bringingit before the court, when, to produce a complete defence, the defendantneed only declare that he had a conscientious objection to the law underwhich the information was laid against him? Many idle or obstinate orprejudiced people would develop conscientious objections to anythingwhich gives trouble or that they happen to dislike. For instance, if thesame principle were applied to education, I believe that within a veryfew years not twenty-five per cent. of the children belonging to theclasses that are educated out of the rates would ever pass the SchoolBoard standards.

Thus it came about that the harvest was ripe, and over ripe, awaitingonly the appointed sickle of disease. Once or twice already that sicklehad been put in, but always before the reaping began it was stayed bythe application of the terrible rule of isolation known as the improvedLeicester system.

Among some of the natives of Africa when smallpox breaks out in a kraal,that kraal is surrounded by guards and its inhabitants are left torecover or perish, to starve or to feed themselves as chance andcircumstance may dictate. During the absence of the smallpox laws thesame plan, more mercifully applied, prevailed in England, and thusthe evil hour was postponed. But it was only postponed, for like acumulative tax it was heaping up against the country, and at last thehour had come for payment to an authority whose books must be balancedwithout remittance or reduction. What is due to nature that nature takesin her own way and season, neither less nor more, unless indeed theskill and providence of man can find means to force her to write off thedebt.

Five days after my encounter with the red-headed vagrant, the followingparagraph appeared in one of the local papers: "Pocklingham. In thecasual ward of the Union house for this district a tramp, name unknown,died last night. He had been admitted on the previous evening, but, forsome unexplained reason, it was not noticed until the next morning thathe suffered from illness, and, therefore, he was allowed to mix withthe other inmates in the general ward. Drs. Butt and Clarkson, who werecalled in to attend, state that the cause of death was the worst form ofsmallpox. The body will be buried in quicklime, but some alarm is feltin the district owing to the deceased, who, it is said, arrived herefrom Dunchester, where he had been frequenting various tramps' lodgings,having mixed with a number of other vagrants, who left the house beforethe character of his sickness was discovered, and who cannot now betraced. The unfortunate man was about forty years of age, of mediumheight, and red-haired."

The same paper had an editorial note upon this piece of news, at the endof which it remarked, as became a party and an anti-vaccination organ:"The terror of this 'filth disease,' which in our fathers' time amountedalmost to insanity, no longer afflicts us, who know both that itseffects were exaggerated and how to deal with it by isolation withoutrecourse to the so-called vaccine remedies, which are now rejected by alarge proportion of the population of these islands. Still, as we haveascertained by inquiry that this unfortunate man did undoubtedly spendseveral days and nights wandering about our city when in an infectiouscondition, it will be as well that the authorities should be on thealert. We do not want that hoary veteran--the smallpox scare--to rearits head again in Dunchester, least of all just now, when, in view ofthe imminent election, the accustomed use would be made of it by ourprejudiced and unscrupulous political opponents."

"No," I said to myself as I put the paper down, "certainly we do notwant a smallpox scare just now, and still less do we want the smallpox."Then I thought of that unfortunate red-headed wretch, crazy with thetorment of his disease, and of his hideous laughter, as he hunted andcaught the children who made a mock of him--the poor children, scarcelyone of whom was vaccinated.

A week later I opened my political campaign with a large public meetingin the Agricultural Hall. Almost up to the nomination day no candidatewas forthcoming on the other side, and I thought that, for the fourthtime, I should be returned unopposed. Of a sudden, however, a name wasannounced, and it proved to be none other than that of my rival of manyyears ago--Sir Thomas Colford--now like myself growing grey-headed, butstill vigorous in mind and body, and as much respected as ever by thewealthier and more educated classes of our community. His appearancein the field put a new complexion on matters; it meant, indeed, thatinstead of the easy and comfortable walk over which I had anticipated, Imust fight hard for my political existence.

In the course of my speech, which was very well received, for I wasstill popular in the town even among the more moderate of my opponents,I dwelt upon Sir Thomas Colford's address to the electorate which hadjust come into my hands. In this address I was astonished to seea paragraph advocating, though in a somewhat guarded fashion, there-enactment of the old laws of compulsory vaccination. In a draft whichhad reached me two days before through some underground channel, thisparagraph had not appeared, thus showing that it had been added by anafterthought and quite suddenly. However, there it was, and I made greatplay with it.

What, I asked the electors of Dunchester, could they think of a manwho in these

modern and enlightened days sought to reimpose upon a freepeople the barbarous infamies of the Vaccination Acts? Long ago we hadfought that fight, and long ago we had relegated them to limbo, where,with such things as instruments of torment, papal bulls and writs ofattainder, they remained to excite the wonder and the horror of our ownand future generations.

Well would it have been for me if I had stopped here, but, led away bythe subject and by the loud cheers that my treatment of it, purposelyflamboyant, never failed to evoke, forgetful too for the moment of theRed-headed Man, I passed on to deductions. Our opponents had prophesied,I said, that within ten years of the passing of the famous ConscienceClause smallpox would be rampant. Now what were the facts? Althoughalmost twice that time had gone by, here in Dunchester we had sufferedfar less from smallpox than during the compulsory period, for at noone time during all these eighteen or twenty years had three cases beenunder simultaneous treatment within the confines of the city.

"Well, there are five now," called out a voice from the back of thehall.

I drew myself up and made ready to wither this untruthful brawler withmy best election scorn, when, of a sudden, I remembered the Red-headedMan, and passed on to the consideration of foreign affairs.

From that moment all life went out of my speech, and, as it seemed tome, the enthusiasm of the meeting died away. As soon as it was over Imade inquiries, to find that the truth had been hidden from me--therewere five, if not seven cases of smallpox in different parts of thecity, and the worst feature of the facts was that three of the patientswere children attending different schools. One of these children, it wasascertained, had been among those who were playing round the fountainabout a fortnight since, although he was not one whom the red-hairedtramp had touched, but the other two had not been near the fountain. Thepresumption was, therefore, that they had contracted the disease throughsome other source of infection, perhaps at the lodging-house where theman had spent the night after bathing in the water. Also it seemed that,drawn thither by the heat, in all two or three hundred children hadvisited the fountain square on this particular evening, and that many ofthem had drunk water out of the basin.

Never do I remember feeling more frightened than when these facts cameto my knowledge, for, added to the possible terrors of the position, wasmy constitutional fear of the disease which I have already described. Onmy way homewards I met a friend who told me that one of the children wasdead, the malady, which was of an awful type, having done its work veryswiftly.

Like a first flake from a snow-cloud, like a first leaf falling inautumn from among the myriads on some great tree, so did this littlelife sink from our number into the silence of the grave. Ah! how manywere to follow? There is a record, I believe, but I cannot give it. InDunchester alone, with its population of about 50,000, I know thatwe had over 5000 deaths, and Dunchester was a focus from which thepestilence spread through the kingdom, destroying and destroying anddestroying with a fury that has not been equalled since the days of theBlack Death.

But all this was still to come, for the plague did not get a grip atonce. An iron system of isolation was put in force, and every possiblemeans was adopted by the town authorities, who, for the most part, wereanti-vaccinationists, to suppress the facts, a task in which they wereassisted by the officials of the Local Government Board, who had theirinstructions on the point. As might have been expected, the party inpower did not wish the political position to be complicated by an outcryfor the passing of a new smallpox law, so few returns were published,and as little information as possible was given to the papers.

For a while there was a lull; the subject of smallpox was taboo, andnobody heard much about it beyond vague and indefinite rumours. Indeed,most of us were busy with the question of the hour--the eternal questionof beer, its purity and the method of its sale. For my part, I madefew inquiries; like the ostrich of fable I hid my head in the sands ofpolitical excitement, hoping that the arrows of pestilence would pass usby.

And yet, although I breathed no word of my fears to a living soul, in myheart I was terribly afraid.

CHAPTER XII - THE SHADOW OF PESTILENCE

Very soon it became evident that the fight in Dunchester would besevere, for the electorate, which for so many years had been my patientservant, showed signs of rebelling against me and the principles Ipreached. Whether the voters were moved by a desire for change, whetherthey honestly disagreed with me, or whether a secret fear of thesmallpox was the cause of it, I do not know, but it is certain thata large proportion of them began to look upon me and my views withdistrust.

At any other time this would not have caused me great distress; indeeddefeat itself would have had consolations, but now, when I appearedto be on the verge of real political distinction, the mere thought offailure struck me with dismay. To avoid it, I worked as I had not workedfor years. Meetings were held nightly, leaflets were distributed bythe ton, and every house in the city was industriously visited by mycanvassers, who were divided into bands and officers like a regiment.

The head of one of these bands was my daughter Jane, and never did acandidate have a more able or enthusiastic lieutenant. She was giftedwith the true political instinct, which taught her what to say and whatto leave unsaid, when to press a point home and when to abandon it foranother; moreover, her personal charm and popularity fought for hercause.

One evening, as she was coming home very tired after a long day's workin the slums of the city, Jane arrived at the model cottages outside mypark gates. Having half an hour to spare, she determined to visit a fewof their occupants. Her second call was on the Smith family.

"I am glad to see you now as always, miss," said Mrs. Smith, "but we arein trouble here."

"What, is little Tottie ill again?" Jane asked.

"No, miss, it isn't Tottie this time, it's the baby. She's gotconvulsions, or something like it, and I've sent for Dr. Merchison.Would you like to see her? She's lying in the front room."

Jane hesitated. She was tired and wanted to get home with her canvasscards. But the woman looked tired too and in need of sympathy; possiblyalso, for nature is nature, Jane hoped that if she lingered there alittle, without in any way violating her promise, she might chance tocatch a brief glimpse of the man she

loved.

"Yes, I will come in for a minute," she answered and followed Mrs. Smithinto the room.

On a cheap cane couch in the corner, at the foot of which the child,Tottie, was playing with a doll, lay the baby, an infant of nearlythree. The convulsive fit had passed away and she was sitting upsupported by a pillow, the fair hair hanging about her flushed face, andbeating the blanket with her little fevered hands.

"Take me, mummy, take me, I thirsty," she moaned.

"There, that's how she goes on all day and it fairly breaks my heart tosee her," said the mother, wiping away a tear with her apron. "If you'llbe so kind as to mind her a minute, miss, I'll go and make a littlelemonade. I've got a couple of oranges left, and she seems to like thembest of anything."

Jane's heart was stirred, and, leaning down, she took the child in herarms. "Go and get the drink," she said, "I will look after her till youcome," and she began to walk up and down the room rocking the littlesufferer to and fro.

Presently she looked up to see Dr. Merchison standing in the doorway.

"Jane, you here!" he said.

"Yes, Ernest."

He stepped towards her, and, before she could turn away or remonstrate,bent down and kissed her on the lips.

"You shouldn't do that, dear," she said, "it's out of the bargain."

"Perhaps I shouldn't," he answered, "but I couldn't help it. I said thatI would keep clear of you, and if I have met you by accident it is notmy fault. Come, let me have a look at that child."

Taking the little girl upon his knee, he began to examine her, feelingher pulse and looking at her tongue. For a while he seemed puzzled, thenJane saw him take a little magnifying glass from his pocket and by thehelp of it search the skin of the patient's forehead, especially just atthe roots of the hair. After this he looked at the neck and wrists, thenset the child down on the couch, waving Jane back when she advanced totake it, and asked the mother, who had just entered the room with thelemonade, two or three short, quick questions.

Next he turned to Jane and said--

"I don't want to frighten you, but you will be as well out of this. It'slucky for you," he added with a little smile, "that when you were bornit wasn't the fashion for doctors to be anti-vaccinationists, for,unless I am much mistaken, that child has got smallpox."

"Smallpox!" said Jane, then added aggressively, "Well, now we shall seewhose theory is right, for, as you saw, I was nursing her, and I havenever been vaccinated in my life. My father would not allow it, and Ihave been told that it won him his first election."

Ernest Merchison heard, and for a moment his face became like that of aman in a fit.

"The wicked----" he began, and stopped himself by biting his lips tillthe blood came. Recovering his calm with an effort, he turned to Janeand said in a hoarse voice:--

"There is still a chance; it may be in time; yes, I am almost sure thatI can save you." Then he plunged his hand into his breast pocket anddrew out a little case of instruments. "Be so good as to bare your leftarm," he said; "fortunately, I have the stuff with me."

"What for?" she asked.

"To be vaccinated."

"Are you mad, Ernest?" she said. "You know who I am and how I have beenbrought up; how, then, can you suppose that I would allow you to putthat poison into my veins?"

"Look here, Jane, there isn't much time for argument, but just listen tome for one minute. You know I am a pretty good doctor, don't you? for Ihave that reputation, haven't I? and I am sure that you believe in me.Well, now, just on this one point and for this one occasion I am goingto ask you to give up your own opinion and to suppose that in thismatter I am right and your father is wrong. I will go farther, andsay that if any harm comes to you from this vaccination beyond theinconvenience of a swollen arm, you may consider all that has beenbetween us as nothing and never speak to me again."

"That's not the point," she answered. "If you vaccinated me and my armfell off in

consequence I shouldn't care for you a bit the less, becauseI should know that you were the victim of a foolish superstition, andbelieved what you were doing to be right. No, Ernest, it is of no use; Ican assure you that I know a great deal more about this subject than youdo. I have read all the papers and statistics and heard the cleverestmen in England lecture upon it, and nothing, nothing, nothing willever induce me to submit to that filthy, that revolting operation."

He heard and groaned, then he tried another argument.

"Listen," he said: "you have been good enough to tell me--severaltimes--well, that you loved me, and, forgive me for alluding to it, butI think that once you were so foolish as to say that you cared for me somuch that you would give your very existence if it could make me happy.Now, I ask you for nothing half so great as that; I ask you to submit toa trifling inconvenience, and, so far as you are personally concerned,to waive a small prejudice for my sake, or, perhaps I had better say, togive in to my folly. Can't you do as much as that for me, Jane?"

"Ernest," she answered hoarsely, "if you asked anything else of me inthe world I would do it--yes, anything you can think of--but this Ican't do and won't do."

"In God's name, why not?" he cried.

"Because to do it would be to declare my father a quack and a liar, andto show that I, his daughter, from whom if from anybody he has a rightto expect faith and support, have no belief in him and the doctrine thathe has taught for twenty years. That is the truth, and it is cruel ofyou to make me say it."

Ernest Merchison ground his teeth, understanding that in face of thiswoman's blind fidelity all argument and appeal were helpless. Then inhis love and despair he formed a desperate resolve. Yes, he was verystrong, and he thought that he could do it.

Catching her suddenly round the waist he thrust her into a cottagearmchair which stood by, and, despite her struggles, began to cut at thesleeve of her dress with the lancet in his hand. But soon he realisedthat the task was hopeless.

"Ernest Merchison," she said, as she escaped from him with blazing eyesand catching breath, "you have done what I will never forgive. Go yourown way in life and I will go mine."

"----To death, Jane."

Then she walked out of the house and through the garden gate. When shehad

gone ten or fifteen yards she looked back to see her lover standingby the gate, his face buried in his hands, and his strong frame shakingwith sobs. For a moment Jane relented; it was terrible to see thisreserved and self-reliant man thus weeping openly, and she knew that thepassion must be mighty which would bring him to this pass. In her heart,indeed, she had never loved him better than at this moment; she lovedhim even for his brutal attempt to vaccinate her by force, because sheunderstood what instigated the brutality. But then she remembered theinsult--she to be seized like a naughty child who will not take itsdose, and in the presence of another woman. And, so remembering, shehardened her heart and passed out of his sight towards the gateways ofthe grave.

At that time Jane said nothing of her adventure to me, though afterwardsI learned every detail of it from her and Mrs. Smith. She did not eventell me that she had visited the Smiths' cottage until one morning,about eight days afterwards, when some blundering servant informed us atbreakfast that the baby Smith was dead of the smallpox in the hospital,and that the other child was dangerously ill. I was shocked beyondmeasure, for this brought the thing home, the people lived almost at mygates. Now I remembered that I had seen the red-headed tramp catchthe child Tottie in his arms. Doubtless she introduced the infection,though, strangely enough, her little sister developed the disease beforeher.

"Jane," I said when the servant had left, "did you hear about the Smithbaby?"

"Yes, father," she answered languidly, "I knew that it had smallpox aweek ago."

"Then why did you not tell me, and how did you know?"

"I didn't tell you, dear, because the mere mention of smallpox alwaysupsets you so much, especially just now with all this election worrygoing on; and I knew it because I was at the Smiths' cottage and nursingthe baby when the doctor came in and said it was smallpox."

"You were nursing the baby!" I almost screamed as I sprang from my seat."Great heavens, girl; why, you will infect the whole place."

"That was what Ernest--Dr. Merchison--seemed to think. He wanted tovaccinate me."

"Oh, and did you let him?"

"How can you ask me such a question, father, remembering what you havealways

taught me? I said----" and with omissions she told me the gist ofwhat had passed between them.

"I didn't mean that," I answered when she had done. "I thought thatperhaps under the influence of shock----Well, as usual, you showed yourwisdom, for how can one poison kill another poison?" and, unable to bearit any longer, making some excuse, I rose and left the room.

Her wisdom! Great heavens, her wisdom! Why did not that fool, Merchison,insist? He should have authority over her if any man had. And now it wastoo late--now no vaccination on earth could save her, unless by chanceshe had escaped infection, which was scarcely to be hoped. Indeed, sucha thing was hardly known as that an unvaccinated person coming intoimmediate contact with a smallpox patient after the eruption hadappeared, should escape infection.

What did this mean? It meant that within a few days Jane, my only anddarling child, the very hope and centre of my life, would be in thefangs of one of the most dreadful and dangerous diseases known tohumanity. More, having never been vaccinated, that disease was sure tostrike her with its full force, and the type of it which had appearedin the city was such that certainly not more than one-half of theunprotected persons attacked came alive out of the struggle.

This was bad enough, but there were other things behind. I had neverbeen vaccinated since infancy, over fifty years ago, and was thereforepractically unprotected with the enemy that all my lifetime I haddreaded, as I dreaded no other thing or imagination, actually standingat my door. I could not go away because of the election; I dared notshow fear, because they would cry: "Look at the hangman when he sees therope." Here, since compulsory vaccination had been abandoned, we foughtsmallpox by a system of isolation so rigorous that under its cruelprovisions every one of whatever age, rank or sex in whom the diseasedeclared itself was instantly removed to a hospital, while theinhabitants of the house whence the patient came were kept practicallyin prison, not being allowed to mix with their fellows. We had returnedto the preventive measures of centuries ago, much as they were practisedin the time of the Great Plague.

But how could I send my daughter to one of those dreadful pest-pits,there at the moment of struggle to be a standing advertisement of theutter failure and falsity of the system I had preached, backing mystatements with the wager of her life? Moreover, to do so would be todoom myself to defeat at the poll, since under our byelaws, which werealmost ferocious in their severity, I could no longer appear in publicto prosecute my canvass, and, if my personal influence was withdrawn,then most certainly my adversary would win.

Oh, truly I who had sown bounteously was reaping bounteously. Truly thebirds which I had sent out on their mission of evil had come home toroost upon my roof-tree.

CHAPTER XIII - HARVEST

Another five days went by--to me they were days of most unspeakabledoubt and anguish. Each morning at breakfast I waited for the coming ofJane with an anxiety which was all the more dreadful because I forcedmyself to conceal it. There had been no further conversation between usabout the matter that haunted both our minds, and so fearful was I lestshe should divine my suspense that except in the most casual way I didnot even dare to look at her as she entered the room.

On the fifth morning she was late for breakfast, not a common thing, foras a rule she rose early. I sent one of the parlour-maids to her room toask if she was coming down, and stood awaiting the answer with much thesame feeling as a criminal on his trial awaits the verdict of the jury.Presently the girl returned with the message that Miss Therne would bedown in a few minutes, whereat I breathed again and swallowed a littlefood, which till then I had been unable to touch.

Soon she came, and I saw that she was rather pale and languid, owing tothe heat, perhaps, but that otherwise she looked much as usual.

"You are late, dear," I said unconcernedly.

"Yes, father," she answered; "I woke up with a little headache and wentto sleep again. It has gone now; I suppose that it is the heat."

As she spoke she kissed me, and I thought--but this may have beenfancy--that her breath felt cold upon my cheek.

"I daresay," I said, and we sat down to table. By my plate lay a greatpile of correspondence, which I opened while making pretence to eat,but all the time I was watching Jane over the top of those wearisomeletters, most of them from beggars or constituents who "wanted to know."One, however, was anonymous, from a person who signed herself "Mother."It ran:--

"Sir,--After hearing your speeches some years ago, and being told thatyou were such a clever man, I became a Conscientious Objector, and wouldnot let them vaccinate any more of my children. The three who were notvaccinated have all been taken to the hospital with the smallpox, andthey tell me (for I am not allowed to see them) that one of them isdead; but the two who were vaccinated are quite well. Sir, I thoughtthat you would

like to know this, so that if you have made any mistakeyou may tell others. Sir, forgive me for troubling you, but it is aterrible thing to have one's child die of smallpox, and, as I acted onyour advice, I take the liberty of writing the above."

Again I looked at Jane, and saw that although she was sipping her teaand had some bacon upon her plate she had eaten nothing at all. Like thecatch of a song echoed through my brain that fearsome sentence: "It isa terrible thing to have one's child die of the smallpox." Terrible,indeed, for now I had little doubt but that Jane was infected, andif she should chance to die, then what should I be? I should be hermurderer!

After breakfast I started upon my rounds of canvassing andspeech-making. Oh, what a dreadful day was that, and how I loathed thework. How I cursed the hour in which I had taken up politics, and soldmy honour to win a seat in Parliament and a little cheap notoriety amongmy fellow-men. If Stephen Strong had not tempted me Jane would have beenvaccinated in due course, and therefore, good friend though he had beento me, and though his wealth was mine to-day, I cursed the memoryof Stephen Strong. Everywhere I went that afternoon I heard ominouswhispers. People did not talk openly; they shrugged their shoulders andnodded and hinted, and all their hints had to do with the smallpox.

"I say, Therne," said an old friend, the chairman of my committee, witha sudden outburst of candour, "what a dreadful thing it would be ifafter all we A.V.'s were mistaken. You know there are a good many casesof it about, for it's no use disguising the truth. But I haven't heardof any yet among the Calf-worshippers" (that was our cant term for thosewho believed in vaccination).

"Oh, let be!" I answered angrily, "it is too late to talk of mistakes,we've got to see this thing through."

"Yes, yes, Therne," he said with a dreary laugh, "unless it shouldhappen to see us through."

I left him, and went home just in time to dress. There were some peopleto dinner, at which Jane appeared. Her lassitude had vanished, and, aswas her manner when in good spirits, she was very humorous and amusing.Also I had never seen her look so beautiful, for her colour was highand her dark eyes shone like the diamond stars in her hair. But again Iobserved that she ate nothing, although she, who for the most part dranklittle but water, took several glasses of champagne and two tumblers ofsoda. Before I could get

rid of my guests she had gone to bed. At lengththey went, and going to my study I began to smoke and think.

I was now sure that the bright flush upon her cheeks was due to what wedoctors call pyrexia, the initial fever of smallpox, and that thepest which I had dreaded and fled from all my life was established in myhome. The night was hot and I had drunk my fill of wine, but I sat andshook in the ague of my fear. Jane had the disease, but she was youngand strong and might survive it. I should take it from her, and in thatevent assuredly must die, for the mind is master of the body and thething we dread is the thing that kills us.

Probably, indeed, I had taken it already, and this very moment the seedsof sickness were at their wizard work within me. Well, even if it wasso?--I gasped when the thought struck me--as Merchison had recognised inthe case of Jane, by immediate vaccination the virus could be destroyed,or if not destroyed at least so much modified and weakened as to becomealmost harmless. Smallpox takes thirteen or fourteen days to develop;cowpox runs its course in eight. So even supposing that I had beeninfected for two days there was still time. Yes, but none to lose!

Well, the thing was easy--I was a doctor and I had a supply ofglycerinated lymph; I had procured some fresh tubes of it only the otherday, to hold it up before my audiences while I dilated on its foulnessand explained the evils which resulted from its use. Supposing now thatI made a few scratches on my arm and rubbed some of this stuff intothem, who would be the wiser? The inflammation which would follow wouldnot be sufficient to incapacitate me, and nobody can see through a man'scoat sleeve; even if the limb should become swollen or helpless I couldpretend that I had strained it. Whatever I had preached to prove mypoint and forward my ambition, in truth I had never doubted the efficacyof vaccination, although I was well aware of the dangers that mightresult from the use of impure or contaminated lymph, foul surroundings,and occasionally, perhaps, certain conditions of health in the subjecthimself. Therefore I had no prejudice to overcome, and certainly I wasnot a Conscientious Objector.

It came to this then. There were only two reasons why I should notimmediately vaccinate myself--first, that I might enjoy in secret avirtuous sense of consistency, which, in the case of a person who hadproved himself so remarkably inconsistent in this very matter, wouldbe a mere indulgence of foolish pride; and secondly, because if I did Imight be found out. This indeed would be a catastrophe too terrible tothink of, but it was not in fact a risk that need be taken into account.

But where was the use of weighing all these pros and cons? Such foolishdoubts and idle arguments melted into nothingness before the presenceof the spectre that stood upon my threshold, the hideous, spottedPestilence who had slain my father, who held my daughter by the throat,and who threatened to grip me with his frightful fingers. What wereinconsistencies and risks to me compared to my living terror of theThing that had dominated my whole existence, reappearing at its everycrisis, and by some strange fate even when it was far from me, throwingits spell over my mind and fortunes till, because of it, I turned myskill and knowledge to the propagation of a lie, so mischievous in itsresults that had the world known me as I was it would have done wiselyto deal by me as it deals with a dangerous lunatic?

I would do it and at once.

First, although it was unnecessary as all the servants had gone to rest,I locked that door of my study which opened into the hall. The otherdoor I did not think of locking, for beyond it was nothing but theprivate staircase which led to the wing of the house occupied by Janeand myself. Then I took off my coat and rolled up my shirt sleeve,fastening it with a safety-pin to the linen upon my shoulder. After thisI lit a spirit-lamp and sterilised my lancet by heating it in the flame.Now, having provided myself with an ivory point and unsealed the tinytube of lymph, I sat down in a chair so that the light from the electriclamp fell full upon my arm, and proceeded to scape the skin with thelancet until blood appeared in four or five separate places. Next I tookthe ivory point, and, after cleansing it, I charged it with the lymphand applied it to the abrasions, being careful to give each of them aliberal dose. The operation finished, I sat still awhile letting myarm hang over the back of the chair, in order that the blood might drythoroughly before I drew down my shirt sleeve.

It was while I was sitting thus that I heard some movement behind me,and turned round suddenly to find myself face to face with my daughterJane. She was clothed only in her nightdress and a bedroom wrapper, andstood near to the open staircase door, resting her hand upon the end ofa lounge as though to support herself.

For one moment only I saw her and noted the look of horror in her eyes,the next I had touched the switch of the electric light, and, save forthe faint blue glimmer of the spirit lamp, there was darkness.

"Father," she said, and in the gloom her voice sounded far away andhollow,

"what are you doing to your arm?"

"I stumbled and fell against the corner of the mantelpiece and scratchedit," I began wildly, but she stopped me.

"O father, have pity, for I cannot bear to hear you speak what is nottrue, and--I saw it all."

Then followed a silence made more dreadful by the darkness which the oneghostly point of light seemed to accentuate.

Presently my daughter spoke again.

"Have you no word of comfort to me before I go? How is it that you whohave prevented thousands from doing this very thing yet do it yourselfsecretly and at the dead of night? If you think it safer to vaccinateyourself, why was I, your child, left unvaccinated, and taught that itis a wicked superstition? Father, father, for God's sake, answer me, orI shall go mad."

Then I spoke, as men will speak at the Judgment Day--if there isone--and for the same reason, because I must. "Sit down, Jane, andlisten, and, if you do not mind, let it remain dark; I can tell you bestin the dark."

Then, briefly, but with clearness and keeping nothing back, I told herall, I--her father--laying every pitiable weakness of my nature open tomy child's sight; yes, even to the terror of infection that drove meto the act. All this while Jane answered no word, but when at length Ifinished she said:--

"My poor father, O my poor father! Why did you not tell me all thisyears ago, when you could have confessed your mistake? Well, it is done,and you were not to blame in the beginning, for they forced you to it.And now I have come to tell you that I am very ill--that is why I amhere--my back aches dreadfully, and I fear that I must have caught thishorrible smallpox. Oh! had I known the truth a fortnight ago, I shouldhave let Ernest vaccinate me. It broke my heart to refuse him the firstthing he ever asked of me. But I thought of what you would feel and whata disgrace it would be to you. And now--you see.

"Turn up the light, for I must go back. I daresay that we shall nevermeet again, for remember you are not to come into my room. I will notallow you to come into my room, if I have to kill myself to preventit. No, you must not kiss me either; I daresay that I have begun to beinfectious. Good-bye, father, till we meet again somewhere else, for Iam sure that we do not altogether

die. Oh! now that I know everything,I should have been glad enough to leave this life--if only I hadnever--met Ernest," and turning, Jane, my daughter, crept away, glidingup the broad oak stairs back to the room which she was never to quitalive.

As for me, daylight found me still seated in the study, my braintormented with an agony of remorse and shame which few have lived tofeel, and my heart frozen with fear of what the morrow should bringforth.

After but one day of doubt, Jane's sickness proved to be smallpox of theprevailing virulent type. But she was not removed to the hospital, forI kept the thing secret and hired a nurse, who had recently beenrevaccinated, for her from a London institution. The doctoring Idirected myself, although I did not actually see her, not now from anyfear of consequences, for I was so utterly miserable that I should havebeen glad to die even of smallpox, but because she would not suffer it,and because also, had I done so, I might have carried infection far andwide, and should have been liable to prosecution under our isolationlaws.

I wished to give up the fight for the seat, but when I suggested it,saying that I was ill, my committee turned upon me fiercely.

"Smallpox," they declared, "was breaking out all over the city, and Ishould stop there to 'sweep out my own grate,' even if they had to keepme by force. If I did not, they would expose me in a fashion I shouldnot like."

Then I gave in, feeling that after all it did not matter much, as in anycase it was impossible for me to leave Dunchester. Personally I had nolonger any fear of contagion, for within a week from that fatal nightfour large vesicles had formed on my arm, and their presence assured methat I was safe. At any other time this knowledge would have rejoiced memore than I can tell, but now, as I have said, I did not greatly care.

Another six days went by, bringing me to the eve of the election. Atlunch time I managed to get home, and was rejoiced to find that Jane,who for the past forty-eight hours had been hovering between life anddeath, had taken a decided turn for the better. Indeed, she told me soherself in quite a strong voice as I stood in the doorway of her room,adding that she hoped I should have a good meeting that night.

It would seem, however, that almost immediately after I left a changefor the

worse set in, of such a character that Jane felt within herselfher last hour was at hand. Then it was that she ordered the nurse towrite a telegram at her dictation. It was to Dr. Merchison, and ran:"Come and see me at once, do not delay as I am dying.--Jane."

Within half an hour he was at her door. Then she bade the nurse tothrow a sheet over her, so that he might not see her features which werehorribly disfigured, and to admit him.

"Listen," she said, speaking through the sheet, "I am dying of thesmallpox, and I have sent for you to beg your pardon. I know now thatyou were right and I was wrong, although it broke my heart to learn it."

Then by slow degrees and in broken words she told him enough of what shehad learned to enable him to guess the rest, never dreaming, poor child,of the use to which he would put his knowledge, being too ill indeed toconsider the possibilities of a future in which she could have no part.

The rest of that scene has nothing to do with the world; it has nothingto do with me; it is a private matter between two people who are dead,Ernest Merchison and my daughter, Jane Therne. Although my ownbeliefs are nebulous, and at times non-existent, this was not so in mydaughter's case. Nor was it so in the case of Ernest Merchison, whowas a Scotchman, with strong religious views which, I understand, underthese dreadful circumstances proved comfortable to both of them. At theleast, they spoke with confidence of a future meeting, which, if theirfaith is well founded, was not long delayed indeed; for, strong ashe seemed to be, within the year Merchison followed his lover to thechurchyard, where they lie side by side.

About half-past six Jane became unconscious, and an hour afterwards shedied.

Then in his agony and the bitterness of his just rage a dreadful purposearose in the mind of Merchison. He went home, changed his clothes,disinfected himself, and afterwards came on to the Agricultural Hall,where I was addressing a mass meeting of the electors. It was a vast andsomewhat stormy meeting, for men's minds were terrified and overshadowedby the cases of disease which were reported in ever-increasing numbers,and even the best of my supporters had begun to speculate whether or nomy anti-vaccination views were after all so absolutely irrefutable.

Still, my speech, which by design did not touch on the smallpox scare,was received with respect, if not with enthusiasm. I ended it, however,with an eloquent peroration, wherein I begged the people of Dunchesterto stand fast by those great principles of individual freedom, which fortwenty years it had been my pride and privilege to inculcate; and on themorrow, in spite of all arguments that might be used to dissuade them,fearlessly to give their suffrages to one who for two decades had provedhimself to be their friend and the protector of their rights.

I sat down, and when the cheers, with which were mixed a few hoots, hadsubsided, my chairman asked if any one in the meeting wished to questionthe candidate.

"I do," said a voice speaking from beneath the shadow of the gallery faraway. "I wish to ask Dr. Therne whether he believes in vaccination?"

When the meeting understood the meaning of this jester's question, atitter of laughter swept over it like a ripple over the face of a pond.The chairman, also rising with a smile, said: "Really, I do not thinkit necessary to put that query to my friend here, seeing that for nearlytwenty years he has been recognised throughout England as one of thechampions of the anti-vaccination cause which he helped to lead totriumph."

"I repeat the question," said the distant voice again, a cold deep voicewith a note in it that to my ears sounded like the knell of approachingdoom.

The chairman looked puzzled, then replied: "If my friend will come uphere instead of hiding down there in the dark I have no doubt that Dr.Therne will be able to satisfy his curiosity."

There was a little commotion beneath the gallery, and presently a manwas seen forcing his way up the length of the huge and crowded hall.For some reason or other the audience watched his slow approach withoutimpatience. A spirit of wonder seemed to have taken possession of them;it was almost as though by some process of telepathy the thought whichanimated the mind of this questioner had taken a hold of their minds,although they did not quite know what that thought might be. Moreoverthe sword of smallpox hung over the city, and therefore the subject wasof supreme interest. When Death is near, whatever they may pretend, menthink of little else.

Now he was at the foot of the platform, and now in the gaunt, powerfulframe I recognised my daughter's suitor, Ernest Merchison, and knew

thatsomething dreadful was at hand, what I could not guess.

There was still time--I might have pretended to be ill, but my brain wasso weary with work and sorrow, and so occupied, what was left of it,in trying to fathom Merchison's meaning, that I let the precious momentslip. At length he was standing close by me, and to me his face waslike the face of an avenging angel, and his eyes shone like that angel'ssword.

"I wish to ask you, sir," he said again, "whether or no you believe thatvaccination is a prophylactic against smallpox."

Once more there were opportunities of escape. I might for instance haveasked for a definition of vaccination, of prophylactics and of smallpox,and thus have argued till the audience grew weary. But some God ofvengeance fought upon his side, the hand of doom was over me, and apower I could not resist dragged the answer from my lips.

"I think, sir," I replied, "that, as the chairman has told you, thewhole of my public record is an answer to your question. I have oftenexpressed my views upon this matter; I see no reason to change them."

Ernest Merchison turned to the audience.

"Men of Dunchester," he said in such trumpet-like and thrilling tonesthat every face of the multitude gathered there was turned upon him,"Dr. Therne in answer to my questions refers to his well-known views,and says that he has found no reason to change them. His views are thatvaccination is useless and even mischievous, and by preaching themhe has prevented thousands from being vaccinated. Now I ask him toillustrate his faith by baring his left arm before you all."

What followed? I know not. From the audience went up a great gaspmingled with cries of "yes" and "shame" and "show him." Mysupporters on the platform murmured in indignation, and I, round whomthe whole earth seemed to rush, by an effort recovering my self-control,rose and said:--

"I am here to answer any question, but I ask you to protect me frominsult."

Again the tumult and confusion swelled, but through it all, calm asdeath, inexorable as fate, Ernest Merchison stood at my side. When ithad died down, he said:--

"I repeat my challenge. There is smallpox in this city--people are lyingdead of

it--and many have protected themselves by vaccination: letDr. Therne prove that he has not done this also by baring his left armbefore you all."

The chairman looked at my face and his jaw dropped. "I declare thismeeting closed," he said, and I turned to hurry from the platform,whereat there went up a shout of "No, no." It sank to a suddensilence, and again the man with the face of fate spoke.

"Murderer of your own child, I reveal that which you hide!"

Then with his right hand suddenly he caught me by the throat, with hisleft hand he gripped my linen and my garments, and at one wrench rippedthem from my body, leaving my left breast and shoulder naked. And there,patent on the arm where every eye might read them, were those proofs ofmy infamy which he had sought.

I swooned away, and, as I sank into oblivion, there leapt from the lipsof the thousands I had betrayed that awful roar of scorn and fury whichhas hunted me from my home and still haunts me far across the seas.

My story is done. There is nothing more to tell.

THE END

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