

"Not at all. Drink this!" I dashed some brandy into the water, and the colour began to come back to his bloodless cheeks.

"That's better!" said he. "And now, doctor, perhaps you would kindly attend to my thumb, or rather to the place where my thumb used to be."

He unwound the handkerchief and held out his hand. It gave even my hardened nerves a shock to look at it. There were four protruding fingers and a horrid red spongy surface where the thumb should have been. It had been hacked or torn right out from the roots.

"Great heavens!" I cried, "this is a terrible injury. It must have bled considerably."

"Yes, it did. I fainted when it was done; and I think I must have been senseless for a long time. When I came to I found that it was still bleeding, so I tied one end of my handkerchief very tightly round the wrist, and braced it up with a twig.

"Excellent! You should have been a surgeon."

"It is a question of hydraulics, you see, and came within my own province."

"This has been done," said I, examining the wound, "by a very heavy and sharp instrument."

"A thing like a cleaver," said he.

"An accident, I presume?"

"By no means."

"What, a murderous attack?"

"Very murderous, indeed."

"You horrify me."

I sponged the wound, cleaned it, dressed it, and finally covered it over with cotton wadding and carbolised bandages. He lay back without wincing, though he bit his lip from time to time.

"How is that?" I asked when I had finished.

"Capital! Between your brandy and your bandage, I feel a new man. I was very weak, but I have had a good deal to go through."

"Perhaps you had better not speak of the matter. It is evidently trying to your nerves."

"Oh, no; not now. I shall have to tell my tale to the police; but, between ourselves, if it were not for the convincing evidence of this wound of mine, I should be surprised if they believed my statement, for it is a very extraordinary one, and I have not much in the way of proof with which to back it up. And, even if they believe me, the views which I can give them are so vague that it is a question whether justice will be done."

"Hal!" I cried, "if it is anything in the nature of a problem which you desire to see solved, I should strongly recommend you to come my friend, Mr Sherlock Holmes, before you go to the official police."

"Oh, I have heard of that fellow," answered my visitor, "and I should be very glad if he would take the matter up, though, of course, I must see the official police as well. Would you give me an introduction to him?"

"I'll do better. I take you round to him myself."

"I should be immensely obliged to you."

"We'll call a cab, and I go together. We shall just be in time to have a little breakfast with him. Do you feel equal to it?"

"Yes, I shall not feel easy until I have told my story."

"Then my servant will call a cab, and I shall be with you in an instant." I rushed upstairs, explained the matter shortly to my wife, and in five minutes was inside a hansom, driving with my new acquaintance to Baker street.

Sherlock Holmes was, as I expected, lounging about his sitting-room in his dressing-gown reading the agony column of the *Times*, and smoking his before-breakfast pipe, which was composed of all the plugs and dottels left from his smokes the day before, all carefully dried and collected on the corner of the mantelpiece. He received us in his quietly genial fashion, ordered fresh eggs, and joined us in a hearty meal. When it was concluded he seated our new acquaintance upon the sofa, placed a pillow beneath his head, and laid a glass of brandy and water within his reach.

"It is easy to see that your experience has been no common one Mr Hatherley," said he. "Pray lie down there, and make yourself absolutely at home. Tell us what you can but stop when you are tired, and keep up your strength with a little stimulant."

"Thank you," said my patient, "but I have felt another man since the doctor bandaged me, and I think that your breakfast has completed the cure. I shall take up as little of your valuable time as possible, so I shall start at once upon my peculiar experiences."

Holmes sat in his big armchair with the weary, heavy-lidded expression which veiled his keen and eager nature, while I sat opposite to him, and we listened in silence to the strange story which our visitor detailed to us.

"You must know," he said, "that I am an orphan and a bachelor, residing alone in lodgings in London. By profession I am a hydraulic engineer, and I have had considerable experience of my work during the seven years that I was apprenticed to Verner and Matheson, the well-known firm, of Greenwich. Two years ago, having served my time, and having also come into a fair sum of money through my

poor father's death, I determined to start in business for myself, and took professional chambers in Victoria street.

"I suppose that everyone finds his first independent start in business a dreary experience. To me it has been exceptionally so. During two years I have had three consultations and one small job, that is absolutely all that my profession has brought me. My gross earnings amount to £27 10s. Every day, from nine in the morning until four in the afternoon, I waited in my little den, until at last my heart began to sink, and I came to believe that I should never have any practice at all.

"Yesterday, however, just as I was thinking of leaving the office, my clerk entered to say there was a gentleman waiting who wished to see me upon business. He brought up a card, too, with the name of 'Colonel Lystander Stark' engraved upon it. Close at his heels came the Colonel himself, a man rather over the middle size, but of an exceeding thinness. I do not think that I have ever seen so thin a man. His whole face sharpened away into nose and chin, and the skin of his cheeks was drawn quite tense over his outstanding bones. Yet this emaciation seemed to be his natural habit, and due to no disease, for his eye was bright, his step brisk, and his bearing assured. He was plainly but neatly dressed, and his age, I should judge, would be nearer forty than thirty.

"Mr Hatherley," said he, with something of a German accent. "You have been recommended to me, Mr Hatherley, as being a man who is not only proficient in his profession, but is also discreet and capable of preserving a secret."

"I bowed, feeling as flattered as any young man would at such an address. 'May I ask who it was who gave me so good a character?' I asked.

"Well, perhaps it is better that I should not tell you that just at this moment. I have it from the same source that you are both an orphan and a bachelor, and are residing alone in London."

"That is quite correct," I answered, "but you will excuse me if I say that I cannot see how all this bears upon my professional qualifications. I understood that it was on a professional matter that you wished to speak to me?"

"Undoubtedly so. But you will find that all I say is really to the point. I have a professional commission for you, but absolute secrecy is quite essential—absolute secrecy, you understand, and of course we may expect that more from a man who is alone than from one who lives in the bosom of his family."

"If I promise to keep a secret," said I, "you may absolutely depend upon my doing so."

"He looked very hard at me as I spoke and it seemed to me that I had never seen so suspicious and questioning an eye.

"You do promise, then?" said he, at last.

"Yes, I promise."

"Absolute and complete silence, before, during and after? No reference to the matter at all, either in word or writing?"

"I have already given you my word."

"Very good." He suddenly sprang up, and darting like lightning across the room he flung open the door. The passage outside was empty.

"That's all right," said he, coming back. "I know that clerks are sometimes curious as to their master's affairs. Now, we can talk in safety." He drew up his chair very close to mine, and began to stare at me again with the same questioning and thoughtful look.

(To be continued.)

CHRISTCHURCH.

(From our own Correspondent.)

DURING the past fortnight the weather has greatly improved. Farmers in the northern districts are reported to be making good progress with ploughing for spring sowing. Early sown grain has begun to grow vigorously. Fields are verdant in many places, and lambs are seen in some parts.

Thursday last, the day whereon the Grand National Steeplechase Meeting was held, was observed as a public holiday in this city and the town was crowded with visitors. The weather was splendid, and the attendance on the Riccarton racecourse was large, probably the best on record, and the meeting is said to have been one of the most successful that has ever taken place. Ahua won the Grand National amid great excitement, and when the weight was announced to be "right," the owner, the rider, and the horse were enthusiastically cheered.

The Albamba football club (of Dunedin) gained, on Saturday last, an easy victory over the Merrivale club. The former secured twelve points, while four only were scored by the latter. A great crowd of spectators assembled in Hagley Park to witness the contest.

An annual reunion took place at the Catholic Literary Society's rooms on Tuesday evening last. His Lordship Dr Grimes, the Rev Fathers Cummings, V.G.; Foley, Aubrey, Marnie, Walsh, and Le Menant were present. Mr R. Dobbin, president, presided, and