

WHO DID IT?

ONE of the most pleasant recollections of my childhood and its home is that of the medical man, who, as my mother was delicate, and some of her children often ailing, generally called at least once a week, and often twice or thrice.

He was a very becoming, genial, kindly old fellow was Mr. Simley, or, as the village people always called him, Dr. Simley.

There was comfort in every line of his rather red face; hope in every ray of his bright, quick eyes; and when he had time he would tell stories of things that had happened to himself or within his knowledge, and it was strange that, though he himself was so gentle and soothing, his tales were generally full of horrors, and quite of the "thrilling school," but they were all true, and it strikes me that they are better worth recording and preserving than many that are of the airy stuff that dreams are made of, and that are not even "founded on fact."

One of these tales that I have resolved to jot down I shall simply call "Who Did It?" or the Doctor's Story, and I shall tell it as nearly as I can in dear old Simley's own words.

My dear madam, he said, for he always addressed himself to my mother, as she lay, white and wan, on her sofa, and we children crowded round him,—before I go I'll just tell you a very curious thing that happened when first I began to practice at Deal. That book, which I see lying on your table, "Murder Will Out," reminds me of it, but only in contradiction to the popular adage, for in the story I am going to tell you, murder would *not* out.

I had been in practice about three years at Deal, and I was fast asleep one morning—a cold winter's morning—having been up attending a lady till about four o'clock, and I had got warm at last, and fallen sound asleep, dreaming of a delicious banquet, for I had gone to bed faint with hunger, when my assistant rushed up to tell me that a man was below in great distress, begging me to come with him immediately to his house, for that his sister was lying in bed with her throat cut; that no one knew who had done it, but it was much to be feared it was herself. I sprang out of bed, hurriedly dressed myself, and hastened down stairs.

The man was walking up and down my passage impatiently. He was a rough, seafaring sort of man, on on seeing me, said—

"Thank heaven, you have come, sir; but I fear you'll be too late!"

As he spoke I opened the street-door, and we went out together. He led the way.

"When was it done?" I asked.

"Can't say, sir," he replied. "I found her bleeding to death, and quite insensible, when I went into her room to know why she wasn't up getting breakfast ready."

"She is your sister?" I asked.

The man nodded,

"How old?"

"About two and twenty, sir!"

"Married or single?" I asked.

"Single, sir."

"Had she a sweetheart?"

"Yes."

"Had they quarrelled?"

"I think they had a few words."

And she took that to heart?"

"I don't know, sir. I only know he came to stay a few days with us, to settle about her and she getting spliced, and one day, after a talk with her, in which they couldn't quite agree, he disappeared, and hasn't been heard of since."

By this time we had reached a very old and miserable part of Deal. The houses looked like tumble-down wharves, and were made of wood.

At high water the collars were twelve feet deep and more in sea-water. The stairs were like a bad ladder. I never saw a more wretched house.

I followed my leader up into a room on the first floor.

Several people were there. They made way when they recognized "the doctor."

A man had bound the wretched woman's

throat up, and the bleeding seemed to have stopped. She was quite insensible, and almost cold.

She literally seemed to float in her own blood. As far as I could judge, she was a very fine young woman, with jet black hair and a very white skin.

Though anything but new to dreadful scenes, this one thrilled me with horror. Besides I had not broken my fast. A feeling of nausea came over me, and hurrying out of the room, I was obliged to negate all the entreaties that I would stop and see if the unfortunate creature was dead or not.

"That I can answer immediately," said I. "She is not dead. But the loss of blood has been so fearful, that from one moment to another the spark of life may become extinguished. There is no use in my staying, for she must not be moved a hundredth part of an inch from the position in which she is lying."

"But, sir," said Tom Hobson, the brother, "only tell us this: is it possible that she should recover?"

"Young man," said I, "the issues of life and death are not in our hands—there's nothing impossible."

"You know, madam," said the doctor, "how much I am attached to my sister—my adviser—my friend—my housekeeper!"

To own the truth, Hobson's great anxiety about his sister interested me. The stern necessities of the poor, the imperative wants of everyday life, often swallow up the affections in the humbler classes. But knowing that I could do nothing until an evident change took place, I sent word to this effect, by my assistant, when Hobson came, at two the next morning, ringing at my surgery bell.

Half expecting to hear that the bleeding had broken out afresh, and that the poor girl had expired then and there, I visited Hobson's but the next morning. To my surprise, I heard she seemed rather better; she had moved a hand; therefore, a degree of sensibility had returned.

The man, a powerful navvy, who had bound up the throat, cut nearly from ear to ear, was in the hut, and seemed to take almost as deep an interest in the poor creature hovering over eternity, as did her brother himself; but it was an interest of a more hopeful kind.

This man's wife was also in attendance, and I was informed that one or other of them never left the patient for a moment.

Tom Hobson followed me to the door with eager thanks; but I answered there was not much to thank me for, as I had done nothing—but that doing nothing was his poor sister's best chance.

"Chance!" exclaimed Hobson; "then you think there is a chance—I hope she may live?"

"I have more hope than I had yesterday. It is now clear that the jugular was untouched, and that the hasty binding up completely staunches the blood. However, she may, and it is not unlikely, will sink from exhaustion; for I dare not venture to move her to pour a cordial down her throat."

"But to-day you can, at least, give us hope, sir?" said Hobson; and perhaps to-morrow she may be better still."

Bessie Hobson's fearful state was the talk of the place, and everywhere one heard the question, "Who did it?"

"Would she live?" was the query which to me, as a professional man, had the greatest interest.

I found myself almost unconsciously listening to the neighbour's gossip about this unfortunate young creature.

I was told that the man who bound up Bessie's throat was her sweetheart's brother, and this man's wife confirmed what Hobson told me about the young girl's having had words with her sweetheart.

Some of her acquaintances told me that Bessie, who, though a good, industrious girl, was very fond of compliments, had been flirting with a handsome French sailor, but that, in reality, she cared for no one but William Blake, and that she had tried all she could to make it up with him, and was very sorry at his taking himself off

When I weighed all this evidence, and I put to myself the question, "Who did it?" I could not help thinking in my own mind that Bessie's sweetheart, in one of those fits of jealousy that differ so little from madness, had been tempted by the evil one to do the deed.

In all my practice, I never knew a woman cut her throat. The fair sex are, I grieve to say, often as impatient of life under very trying circumstances as men; but they fly to the "tempting pool," not "the felon knife," and so I came to the conclusion that Will Blake had done the dreadful deed.

The improbability of the suicide, the jealous quarrel, the sudden disappearance of Will Blake, all went to prove the fact that Bessie had been murdered by her sweetheart.

As prolonged inanition was as certain to prove fatal as the re-opening of the ghastly wound, I now resolved to administer a little beef-tea. I trembled myself for the result. Would she be able to swallow? Would the inevitable moment prove fatal?

Robert Blake seemed quite confident about his binding up, and certainly he had shown considerable skill. Hobson was pale, and almost breathless. The brother, Blake, and his wife were present when I attempted to give the unfortunate young woman a little cordial and a few spoonfuls of broth. It was a moment of great anxiety for all of us. The first drops were swallowed with the greatest difficulty; but, as the patient proceeded, she gained a little strength, and opened her eyes, but she soon closed them again—to the weakened organs of vision the light was painful. I ordered that the room should be darkened as much as possible, and that the patient should be kept very quiet.

"To-morrow," said I, "there will either be a decided change for the better, or she will be no more."

I was at Hobson's cot early the next morning. "She is no worse," said Mrs. Blake.

"Then I have good hopes," answered I. "The food has passed into the stomach."

And I proceeded to administer more, and in rather larger quantities than the day before; but the portions were very small, and given at long intervals.

It was about five minutes after the last spoonful of broth that Bessie slowly opened her eyes, and endeavoured to hold out her hand to me, but her strength failed her. I could only say from the bottom of my heart, "Heaven bless you!" and enjoin her to remain perfectly quiet and leave her to the constant care of her kind friends.

Her brother followed me to the door. He was too much agitated to speak, but I answered the question he put with his eyes.

"She will live," said I; "that is, if she continues to be equally carefully nursed."

"And that you may depend upon, sir," said Blake, who had overheard my last words.

I called the next morning. From the expression of horror on the faces of Blake and his wife I feared there had been some fearful relapse, and that poor Bessie had expired in the night.

"No, sir," answered Blake; "thank heaven, she's doing well; but her brother has put an end to himself, and I verily believe it was he who did it. We've kept the dreadful news from the poor creature there; but her brother drowned himself last night. He must have jumped off the jetty-head at high water, and this morning I, with some others, found him stark, staring dead on the beach.

"Yes," I exclaimed; "I believe you are right—he did it. Yet what motive could he have?"

"A still tongue makes a wise head, sir," said Blake. "I know more than I choose to tell; but everything comes out at last."

An inquest was held on the body of Hobson. "Accidentally drowned" was the verdict; but I felt certain accident had nothing to do with it, and I became convinced that the man's great anxiety was not lest his sister should die, but lest she should live.

"I knew that all along," said Blake, to whom I had expressed this opinion; "and I verily believe he'd have finished the poor creature off, if we had given him a chance; and since she has