

CONDEMNED TO DIE.

He lived in Queen Anne-street, and he had been our family doctor ever since I could remember. I was feeling a little "seedy," a bit out of sorts, my appetite had failed me, and I was, I felt, a dull dog indeed. So off I went to Dr. Ball; and Pargiter, his man out of livery, who used to wear the Doctor's old clothes and look very much like a physician himself, let me in. It only costs you a guinea to see your doctor; it costs me twenty-two shillings. I give a shilling to Pargiter.

"Is the doctor in, Pargiter?" I said.

"No, he isn't, sir," said the man; "he's away on his annual holiday, you see. But there's a most reliable gentleman seeing his patients for him. You'd better see Dr. Herbert, sir. Master won't be back for a couple of months."

I was shown into Dr. Ball's consulting-room, and at the Doctor's table sat Dr. Herbert, the "reliable gentleman," as Pargiter had called him. "Pray be seated, my dear sir," said Dr. Herbert.

That was exactly what Dr. Ball always said; it is what they all say. But there are ways of saying things. Why, when Ball says it you feel better at once. But then Ball's manner is worth a thousand a year to him; so his professional friends and rivals say. The very sight of old Dr. Ball inspires confidence. What's the good of being a doctor if you don't inspire confidence? Dr. Herbert's "get up" was perfection. His choker—he wore a choker, though he was only five-and-forty at most—was tied just like Ball's. He had gold spectacles—not round glass spectacles, but those queer ones like D's lying on their backs, over the straight tops of which he gazed at me intently. He was tremendously professional altogether.

Before I knew where I was the Doctor had seized my wrist and whipped out his watch—quite the high class professional watch, which clanked like a bottle-jack. Then he dropped my hand suddenly and sighed deeply.

"Want of tone? Loss of flesh? Appetite failing? Sleep bad? Peg too low? General depression? I thought so!"

"You ought to have come here before," continued Dr. Herbert severely. "You're breaking up."

Good gracious! He might have put it less brutally.

"Breaking up?" I repeated mechanically in an awe-stricken voice.

"Don't you feel that your clothes are getting too large for you?" asked Dr. Herbert in a sort of moan. "Of course you do. There, don't answer me, but get your waistcoat undone and your coat off."

I did as I was bid.

Then the Doctor listened to my chest with his stethoscope.

"Dulness," he said, distinct "dulness. Ah! Double mitral bruit, and auriculo-ventricular regurgitation, with diastolic pause. Just as I feared. Ah, yes, probably hereditary. Do you suffer from double vision?" asked the Doctor, stepping back to look at me.

I had turned pale. Wouldn't any fellow turn pale when he suddenly became aware that he was an auriculo-ventricular regurgitator?

"Poor fellow," muttered the Doctor, as if thinking aloud; "not married, I hope?"

"No, sir," I replied, "I am not married. I think you might have spared my feelings a little. You mean to suggest, I suppose, that mine is a bad case?"

Mr. Herbert smiled blandly, and rubbed his chin as though he had been a benevolent ape.

"Will you kindly answer me," I said, for I was very angry.

"Professional etiquette, my dear sir," said the Doctor blandly.

"Tell me at least," I cried, "how long I may expect to last. One year, two years, how long?"

"Do you lead a regular life?" asked Dr. Herbert.

"I do," I replied angrily; "and I am engaged to be married."

"Look here, Doctor," I continued coaxingly, "is there nothing I can do? I will be very careful, I will indeed; I'll wear flannel next the skin, or Dr. Jager, or Hygienic boots, or Harness' electric

belt, or Mother Seigel's Syrup." He only smiled a pitying sort of smile; and then he held out his hand and looked at his great watery eye. I had the sovereign and the shilling ready, wrapped up in tissue-paper. I placed it in his extended palm. "Won't you write me a prescription?" I faltered out.

"What's the use?" said the Doctor.

"When shall I come again?" I groaned.

"What's the use?" repeated Dr. Herbert.

"How long—how long do you give me?" I sobbed out.

"About three months—or less," replied the Doctor; then he held the door open, and it was all over.

Condemned to die! How bright the streets looked. The London season was at its height. I didn't want to die. But—I was an auriculo-ventricular regurgitator; and what was the London season to me?

How was I to break it to Ethelinda? We were to have been married in six months' time, about Christmas or the New Year; we had arranged to pass our honeymoon in Italy. I wondered whether Ethelinda would have got over her sorrow for my loss by Christmas. I might die at any moment, of course; I might drop down dead, and that sort of thing. The Doctor hadn't exactly said so, but he evidently meant it. I hadn't any time to lose. I ought to make my will. I went to a stationers; I bought a sixpenny form of will. As I was paying for it a big black book caught my eye. "Mopes on Heart Disease." The very thing. I would learn the worst. I bought the black book. I went home to my rooms. I ate my badly cooked chop, and then I sat down and made my will. My landlady and her husband witnessed it.

Then I read "Mopes on heart Disease" straight through. I found it rather difficult to understand, but I got some valuable hints. "In advanced cases where there is no hope to be derived from treatment, the greatest attention should be paid to diet and regimen. An attack of indigestion may at any moment prove fatal; and the patient should be restricted to a bland farinaceous diet such as the Revalenta Arabica, which may be varied with milk arrowroot, though the latter article is not of much value as a food. Meat should on no account be permitted." And I had just eaten a chop! "The Revalenta should be prepared with milk and taken frequently in quantities not exceeding a small teacupful."

I went to bed and I sent for the Revalenta Arabica. For two days I carefully followed the suggestion as to diet. I felt myself growing weaker; I was evidently sinking. Then another paragraph alarmed me: "The patient should on no account be confined to bed; exercise in a Bath chair is imperative, other means of locomotion being inadmissible, as jolting may be attended with an immediately fatal result." I ordered a Bath chair at once, much to my landlady's astonishment, and I went out in it.

Everybody turned round to look at me.

I would have written to Ethelinda to break it to her; but "the slightest mental emotion may at any moment prove fatal." That was enough for me! How I longed for a pipe; but I knew that "smoking must of course be rigorously prohibited." Before I went to bed that night I re-read the chapter on "Morbid Changes and Physical Signs of Approaching Dissolution." When I tried to go to sleep I noticed that my feet were cold; and I remembered with horror that that was one of the "physical signs," of—Ugh! I might even not wake next morning, for "dissolution frequently, often, takes place quite painlessly; the patient not awakening from his heavy and untroubled sleep."

Next morning I awoke. I was as hungry as a hunter. I had forgotten for the moment my terrible condition. I had ceased to remember that I was an auriculo-ventricular regurgitator. Ah! it all came back to me: "the patient is frequently harassed by the cravings of a morbid appetite and a hankering after indigestible food." I had longed for cold pork, or steak pie, or something "stodgy." Then I recollected that "the sufferer should be strongly advised not to dress without assistance, as stooping or over-exertion may at any moment produce fatal syncope." How could I put on my socks without stooping?