

# "HIS PLACE in the WORLD"

By Mrs. Bilsborough

## CHAPTER XXV.

## A Straight Talk.

ON a bright, but cold day in mid-winter, Arnold Bassingbroke, still looking rather shaky, was sitting propped up with cushions in an invalid chair, the sun warming the room and a good fire blazing in the grate. He lifted weary eyes as Sir Lawrence entered.

"This looks something like, Arnold, my boy," was the big man's hearty greeting. "How are we feeling now? A bit shaky on the pins, I'll be bound."

"Confoundedly shaky on the pins," replied the invalid with a smile.

"You'll be your own man again in a few more days," said Sir Lawrence encouragingly, as he took a seat opposite and studied Arnold under white bushy eyebrows.

"Goss—I want a straight talk with you," was the abrupt reply. "How long have I been ill?" The dark eyes, looking squarely into those fixed upon them, saw a wary expression appear.

"It's all right, Goss—no evasions—I want the truth."

"H'm—well—to be quite frank, Arnold, it is close on eight weeks since you went to bed."

He watched the effect of this admission.

"Eight weeks! No wonder I feel dicky on my pins! What has kept me in bed all that time?"

"Concussion of the brain—followed by brain fever. You've had an ugly time, Arnold, my boy, but, thank God, with His help, we've pulled you through."

A grave note crept into the doctor's voice; underlying his hearty professional manner was a sincere belief in a higher power than medicine.

Sir Lawrence was deeply attached to Arnold—there were early ties, deep rooted, from which this affection sprang.

His devotion to Arnold's mother in the days of her girlhood—before she passed him over for the Rev. Arnold Bassingbroke—those far-off days when he was a struggling young medico and had still his mark to make in the world; the striking resemblance of the young man before him to the beautiful girl of his early love, in the expressive dark, thoughtful eyes, the delicate refinement of the clever face, the quick sympathy of the sensitive nature: these things, in spite of the hardening effect of the world, could always reawaken echoes of the past, and keep green those tender memories in the big doctor's heart.

Sir Lawrence had not married. He said it was "because he had never had time to do so," but the early disappointment of his youth had left him impervious to the charms of other women, and he gave to Arnold that fatherly affection which had no other outlet.

The invalid was slowly digesting the information he had received.

"Concussion of the brain—followed by brain fever! In that case, I'm afraid it's too late to catch that rascally cabman?" He looked tentatively into the doctor's impassive face.

"On the contrary, I found the house you described and, acting on your statement, supported by information gleaned in the neighbourhood, felt justified in putting Scotland Yard on the job. The police raided the house. The man and woman are in custody."

His words came slowly and carefully as he watched their effect upon Arnold Bassingbroke.

"Good business!" exclaimed the

young man excitedly. "What did they make of the couple?"

"Sodden with drink—both of them," was the terse reply.

"I expect the young woman I was called in to see is dead?" He looked up interrogatively.

"The police found a young woman when they searched the house. It got abroad that the caretakers kept a half-witted daughter there. The police searched the house from cellars to attics, and found her at last in a tiny top room at the back, chained to a staple in the wall."

"Good Heavens!" cried Arnold in horror. "Could she possibly be the poor creature I saw? I'll swear that beautiful girl was no daughter of those two!"

"Whoever she is, there is no trace of beauty left now," said Sir Lawrence soberly. "She was in the last stage of exhaustion from slow starvation; her bones were nearly through her skin; a dry crust and a cup of water were put beside her. A dirty mattress was on the floor for her to lie on—that was all. Evidently she was chained to the wall to keep her from the window, lest she should be seen."

"What a horrible thing!"

"I ought not to have told you all this, Arnold, but I knew you would sleep better for the thought that both these inhuman wretches were in safe custody. They will be charged with attempted murder."

"And the poor creature—where is she?"

"IN hospital now—lying in a critical condition. We want to pull her round if possible—her evidence will be very important."

"Is she half-witted?"

"Well, at present she is light-headed and wanders in delirium, and no wonder. She has old scars which show that she has been ill-used. Her nerve has gone: she will be a wreck all her life, even if she recovers."

"What a damnable crime!" Arnold's white face flushed with indignation. "I wonder how the man dared to stay in the house after the way he used me."

"My dear boy, he evidently thought he had done for you, and had nothing more to fear from that quarter."

Arnold sat up, and looked steadily into the doctor's grave face for a full second.

"Goss, how—did—I—get—back—to—Harley Street? I have the impression that I have been away a long time. At first, I thought it might be the delusion of fever. Now I begin to feel certain that you are keeping things back from me."

His eyes met those of the big doctor with an open challenge.

Sir Lawrence Goss bunched his bushy eyebrows together, and studied the worried-looking face of the invalid.

"I'm not at all sure that I ought to answer all your questions, my boy," he said slowly; "but perhaps it is worse to let you go on churning things over in your mind. If you really want to know how you got back to Harley Street—I will tell you. I brought you back myself in my car."

"You—brought me!" Where was I?"

"In Hyde Park. A little chap of five darted in front of the car. You saved the child, and got knocked down yourself. I needn't tell you how I felt when I knew what had happened."

"What was I doing in Hyde Park?"

"That is what I should like to know," said Sir Lawrence; "but if it will help you any, I will tell you that you had been missing for nine months. Mrs. Gadsby went to Barnes ten days after you disappeared. A man was found insensible on Barnes Common, and from the description she thought it might be you. The man had been dismissed when your housekeeper got there, but the police assured her he had given a perfectly satisfactory account of himself. For a week he had been in a dazed condition, but when he came to himself, he told them he was a poor clerk who had come to London to look for work, was assaulted by some hooligans, and knocked down and robbed. Of course, they let him go as soon as he was fit, so Mrs. Gadsby had a wild-goose chase—and has had many another since, poor body."

"BUT none which so nearly hit the mark. Fancy just missing me like that!"

Sir Lawrence looked with alarmed anxiety at the invalid.

"It's all right, Goss! You needn't look like that; you have given me the clue I wanted. Barnes Common—that was it! Now I know where I was found! That brute must have run me out there in a cab, dumped me on the Common in the dark, and left me for a dead man. Now I understand why he did not bolt—dead men tell no tales."

"Unless they come to life again," corrected Sir Lawrence, "as you seem to have done."

"It was like this, Goss: My head was buzzy—for the life of me I couldn't remember a thing about myself, not even my own name. Everything about me was strange—surroundings and people. There wasn't a blessed thing to help me! They put me into the workhouse infirmary observation ward, and I was afraid they would pop me into the asylum next, so I concocted a story to get away."

"H'm! I see! That was how Mrs. Gadsby got thrown off the scent. If she'd seen you it would have been different. When you got away, what then?"

"They gave me five shillings from the poor box and let me go with a caution. The money lasted exactly one day—with care. I hardly know how things turned out—I wasn't very clear in my mind at the time—but one thing seemed to lead to another, and I got a job next day."

"Chaufeur?" ventured Sir Lawrence, beginning to see daylight. Arnold nodded and laughed.

"Good guess—how did you know?"

"By your clothes when we picked you up in the Park. We've had inquiry agents working all over London and at different ports; and to think you've been going about openly all these months! It seems incredible! Can't think how they can have missed you!"

"I even advertised myself once," said Arnold laughing, "and spent four hours on view near the Albert Memorial, yet no one claimed me."

"Extraordinary!" cried Sir Lawrence. "Most remarkable thing I've ever heard of. What's your theory, Arnold?"

"That if a man goes about openly, he's much less likely to be found than if he tries to hide."

"I don't mean that, boy. I mean, how do you account for not remember-

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## Truth About Dyes for Home Use

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Wool and Silk are animal fibre fabrics. Cotton and Linen are vegetable fibre fabrics. "Union" or "Mixed" goods are usually 60% to 80% Cotton—so must be treated as vegetable fibre fabrics.

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